

DENNIS ETCHISON • BRIAN MOONEY

Fantas Tales

SUMMER

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A PLACE OF NO RETURN
by Hugh B. Cave

Stephen Jones & David Sutton

present

Dave McFerran's

Airgedlámh

An Irish Fantasy Fiction
Magazine

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Dave McFerran died on February 5th, 1980, a few days short of his twenty-sixth birthday. He was a popular and tirelessly irrepressible figure in British Fantasy fandom, but the two publications he hoped to edit himself, *VADHAGH* and *AIRGEDLÁMH* never appeared. Dave had been seriously ill with cancer since July 1979 but after an operation at Christmas he appeared to be recovering slowly. As close associates and friends to the posthumous editor of *AIRGEDLÁMH*, we know that Dave will be missed by a great many fans, and we offer this single issue of the magazine as a special tribute to him.

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A MAGAZINE OF THE WEIRD AND UNUSUAL

FANTASY TALES

Volume
4

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NOTE - Manuscripts should be addressed to David Sutton, 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7TE, England. Communications and examples of artwork should be sent to Stephen Jones, 73 Danes Court, North End Road, Wembley, Middx. HA9 0AE, England. All contributions must be accompanied by return postage. The publishers are not responsible for the loss or return of manuscripts or artwork, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. (c) 1981 FANTASY TALES.

STEPHEN JONES, *Editor.*

DAVID A. SUTTON, *Associate Editor.*



"Two guys from next door cornered him outside our place."

The Dark Country

By DENNIS ETCHISON

Illustration by DAVID LLOYD

MARTIN sat by the pool, the wind drying his hair. A fleshy, airborne spider appeared on the edge of the book which he had been reading there. From this angle it cast a long, pointed needle across the yellowing pages. The sun was hot and clean; it went straight for his nose. Overweight American children practised their volleyball on the bird-of-paradise plants. Weathered rattan furniture gathered dust beyond the peeling diving board.

Traffic passed on the road. Trucks, campers, bikes.

The pool that would not be scraped till summer. The wooden chairs that had been ordered up from the

States. Banana leaves. Olive trees. A tennis court that might be done next year. A single colour TV antenna above the palms. By the slanted cement patio heliotrope daisies, speckled climbing vines. The morning a net of light on the water. Boats fishing in Todos Santos Bay.

A smell like shrimps Veracruz blowing off the silvered waves.

And a strangely familiar island, like a hazy floating giant, where the humpback whales play. Yesterday in Ensenada, the car horns talking and a crab taco in his hand, he had wanted to buy a pair of huaraches and a Mexican shirt. The best tequila in the world for three-and-a-half a litre. Noche Buena beer,

foil labels that always peel before you can read them. Delicious con Filtros cigarettes.

Bottles of agua mineral. Tehuacan con gas. No retornable.

He smiled as he thought of churros at the Blow Hole, the maid who even washed his dishes, the Tivoli Night Club with Reno cocktail napkins, mescal flavoured with worm, eggs fresh from the nest, chorizo grease in the pan, bar girls with rhinestone-studded Aztec headbands, psychoactive liqueurs, seagulls like the tops of valentines, grilled corvina with lemon, the endless plumes of surf...

It was time for a beer run to the bottling factory in town.

"Buenos días!"

Martin looked up, startled. He was blinded by the light. He fumbled his dark glasses down and moved his head. A man and a woman stood over his chair. The sun was at their backs.

"Americano?"

"Yes, said Martin. He shielded his forehead and tried to see their faces. Their features were blacked in by the glare that spilled around their heads.

"I told you he was an American," said the woman. "What are you studying?"

"What?"

Martin closed the book self-consciously. It was a paperback edition of *The Penal Colony*, the only book he had been able to borrow from any of the neighbouring cabins. Possibly it was the only book in Quintas Papagayo. For some reason the thought depressed him profoundly, but he had brought it poolside anyway. It seemed the right thing to do. He could not escape the feeling that he ought to be doing something more than nursing a tan. And the magazines from town were all in Spanish.

He slipped his sketchbook on top of Kafka and opened it awkwardly.

"I'm supposed to be working," he said. "On my drawings. You know how it is." They didn't, probably, but he went on. "It's difficult to get anything done down here."

"He's an artist!" said the woman.

"My wife thought you were an

American student on vacation," said the man.

"Our son is a student, you see," said the woman. Martin didn't, but nodded sympathetically. She stepped aside to sit on the arm of another deck chair under the corrugated green fiberglass siding. She was wearing a sleeveless blouse and thigh-length shorts. "He was studying for his Master's Degree in Political Science at UCLA, but now he's decided not to finish. I tried to tell him he should at least get his teaching credential, but -"

"Our name's Winslow," said the man, extending a muscular hand.

"Mr. and Mrs. Winslow."

"Jack Martin."

"It was the books," said Mr.

Winslow. "Our boy always had books with him, even on visits." He chuckled and shook his head.

Martin nodded.

"You should see his apartment," said Mrs. Winslow. "So many." She gestured with her hands as if describing the symptoms of a hopeless affliction.

There was an embarrassing lull. Martin looked to his feet. He flexed his toes. The right ones were stiff. For something further to do, he uncapped a Pilot Fineliner pen and touched it idly to the paper. Without realizing it, he smiled. This trip must be doing me more good than I'd hoped, he thought. I haven't been near a college classroom in fifteen years.

A wave rushed toward the rocks at the other side of the cabins.

"Staying long?" asked the man, glancing around nervously. He was wearing Bermuda shorts over legs so white they were almost phosphorescent.

"I'm not sure," said Martin.

"May I take a peek at your artwork?" asked the woman.

He shrugged and smiled.

She lifted the sketchbook from his lap with infinite delicacy, as the man began talking again.

He explained that they owned their own motor home, which was now parked on the Point, at the end of the rock beach, above the breakwater. Weekend auto insurance cost them \$13.70 in Tijuana. They came down whenever they got the chance. They

were both retired, but there were other things to consider - just what, he did not say. But it was not the same as it used to be. He frowned at the moss growing in the bottom of the pool, at the baby weeds poking up through the sand in the canister ash trays, at the separating layers of the sawed-off diving board.

Martin could see more questions about to surface behind the man's tired eyes. He cleared his throat and squirmed in his chair, feeling the sweat from his arms soaking into the unsealed wood. Mr. Winslow was right, of course. Things were not now as they once were. But he did not relish being reminded of it, not now, not here.

A small figure in white darted into his field of vision, near the edge of the first cabin. It was walking quickly, perhaps in this direction.

"There's my maid," he said, leaning forward. "She must be finished now." He unstuck his legs from the chaise longue.

"She has keys?" said the man.

"I suppose so. Yes, I'm sure she does. Well -"

"Does she always remember to lock up?"

He studied the man's face, but a lifetime of apprehensions were recorded there, too many for Martin to isolate one and read it accurately.

"I'll remind her," he said, rising.

He picked up his shirt, took a step toward Mrs. Winslow and stood shifting his weight.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the maid put a hand to the side of her face.

Mrs. Winslow closed the pad, smoothed the cover and handed it back. "Thank you," she said oddly.

Martin took it and offered his hand. He realized at once that his skin had become uncomfortably moist, but Mr. Winslow gripped it firmly and held it. He confronted Martin soberly, as if about to impart a bit of fatherly advice.

"They say he comes down out of the hills," said Winslow, his eyes unblinking. Martin half-turned to the low, tan range that lay beyond

the other side of the highway. When he turned back, the man's eyes were waiting. "He's been doing it for years. It's something of a legend around here. They can't seem to catch him. We never took it seriously, until now."

"Is that right?"

"Why, last night, while we were asleep, he stole an envelope of traveller's cheques and a whole carton of cigarettes from behind our heads. Can you beat that? Right inside the camper! Of course we never bothered to lock up. Why should we? Everyone's very decent around here. We've never had any trouble ourselves. Until this trip. It's hard to believe."

"Yes, it is." Martin attempted to pull back as a tingling began in his stomach. But the man continued to pump his hand, almost desperately, Martin thought.

"The best advice I can give you, young man, is to lock your doors at night. From now on. You never know."

"Thanks, I will."

"He comes out after the sun goes down." He would not let go of Martin's hand. "I figure he must hit the beach three-four in the morning, when all the lights are out. Slips right in. No one notices. And then it's too late."

Martin pretended to struggle with the books so that he could drop his hand. "Well, I hope you're able to enjoy the rest of your vacation." He eyed the maid. "Now I'd better -"

"We're warning everybody along the beach," said Winslow.

"Maybe you should report it."

"That don't do no good. They listen to your story, but there's nothing they can do."

"Good luck to you, then," said Martin.

"Thank you again," said the woman peculiarly. "And don't forget. You lock your door tonight!"

"I will," said Martin, hurrying away. I won't, that is. Will, won't, what does it matter? He side-stepped the dazzling flowers of an ice plant and ascended the cracked steps of the pool enclosure. He crossed the paved drive and slowed.

The maid had passed the last of

the beachfront houses and was about to intersect his path. He waited for her to greet him as she always did. I should at least pretend to talk to her, he thought, in case the Winslows are still watching. He felt their eyes, or someone's, close at his back.

"Buenos días," he said cheerfully.

She did not return the greeting. She did not look up. She wagged her head and trotted past, clutching her uniform at the neck.

He paused and stared after her. He wondered in passing about her downcast eyes, and about the silent doorways of the other cabins, though it was already past ten o'clock. And then he noticed the scent of ozone that now laced the air, though no thunderhead was visible yet on the horizon, only a gathering fog far down the coastline, wisps of it beginning to striate the wide, pale sky above the sagging telephone poles. And he wondered about the unsteadiness in Mrs. Winslow's voice as she had handed back the sketchbook. It was not until he was back at the beach that he remembered: the pages he had shown her were blank. There were no sketches at all yet in the pad, only the tiny flowing blot he had made with his pen on the first sheet while they talked, like a miniature misshapen head or something else, something else, stark and unreadable on the crisp white sulfite paper.

HE WAS relieved to see that the private beach had finally come alive with its usual quota of sunbathers. Many of them had probably arisen early, shortly after he left for the quiet of the pool, and immediately swarmed to the surf with no thought of TV or the morning paper, habits they had left checked at the border sixty miles from here. A scattered few lagged back, propped out on their patios, sipping coffee and keeping an eye on the children who were bounding through the spume. The cries of the children and of the gulls cut sharply through the waves which, disappointingly, were beginning to sound to Martin like nothing so much as an enormous screenful of ball bearings.

There was the retired rent-a-cop on holiday with his girl friend, stretched out on a towel and intent on his leg exercises. There was the middle-aged divorcee from two doors down, bent over the tidepools, hunting for moonstones among jealous clusters of aquamarine anemones. And there was Will, making time with the blonde in the blue tank top. He seemed to be explaining to her some sort of diagram in the slicked sand between the polished stones. Martin toed into his worn rubber sandals and went down to join them.

"Want to go to a party?" Will said to him as he came up.

"When?"

"Whenever," said the blonde in the blue top. She tried to locate Martin's face, gave up and gazed back in the general direction of the southern bungalows.

There a party was still in progress, as it had been since last Wednesday, when Will and Martin had arrived. The other party, the one on the north side, had apparently been suspended for a few hours, though just now as Martin watched a penny rocket streaked into the sky from the bathroom window, leaving an almost invisible trail of powder-blue smoke in the air above the water. The skyrocket exploded with a faint report like a distant rifle and began spiraling back to earth. Martin heard hoarse laughter and the sudden cranking-up of stereo speakers inside the sliding doors. So the party there was also nearly in full swing again, or had never let up. Perhaps it was all one big party, with his cabin sandwiched like a Christian Science reading room between two pirate radio stations. He remembered the occasional half-dressed teenager staggering around the firepit and across his porch last night, grunting about more beer and did he know where those nurses were staying? Martin had sat outside till he fell asleep, seeing them piss their kidneys out on the steaming stones of the footpath.

"Bummer," said the girl seriously. Martin noticed that she was lugging around an empty twelve-ounce bottle. She upended it and a few

slippery drops hit the rocks. "You guys wouldn't know where the Dos Equis's stashed, wouldjyou?"

"*No es problema, my dear,*" said Will, steering her toward the patio.

Martin followed. Halfway there the girl wobbled around and hurled the bottle as high as she could away from the shoreline. Unfortunately, her aim was not very good. Martin had to duck. He heard it whistle end-over-end over his head and shatter on the flat rocks. Will caught her under the arms and staggered her inside. Next door, a Paul Simon song was playing on the tape deck.

By the time Martin got there she was on her way out, cradling a bottle of Bohemia. Again she tried to find his eyes, gave up and began picking her way across the rocks.

"Take it slow," yelled Will. "Hey, sure you don't want to lie down for a while?"

Martin grinned at him and walked past into the high-beamed living room. The fireplace was not lighted, nor was the wall heater, but a faint but unmistakable odour of gas lingered in the corners.

"We better stock up on Dos Equis from now on," said Will.

"Is that her favourite?"

"She doesn't care. But we shell-
ed out a deposit on the case of Bohemia. Dos Equis is no return."

Martin stood staring out at the island in the bay. The fishing boats were moving closer to shore. Now he could barely make out the details of the nearest one. He squinted. It wasn't a fishing boat at all, he realized. It was much larger than he had imagined, some kind of oil tanker, perhaps. "Guess what, Will? We're going to have to start locking the doors."

"Why? Afraid the *putas* are gonna OD on Spanish fly and jump our bones in the middle of the night?"

"You wish," said Martin. He sniffed around the heater, then followed the scent to the kitchen and the stove. "The gas pilots," he said. "It's the draft. You - we're - always going in and out. The big door's open all the time."

"Got a match, man?" Will took out a bent cigarette, straightened it and crumpled the pack. The table

was littered with empty packs of cheap Mexican cigarettes, Negritos and Faros mostly. Martin wondered how his friend could smoke such garbage. He took out his Zippo. Will struck it with an exaggerated shaking of his hands, but it was out of fluid. He stooped over the gas stove and winked at Martin. He turned the knob. The burner lit. He inhaled, coughed and reached for the tequila. He poured himself a tall one mixed with grapefruit juice. "Mmm. Good for the throat, but it still burns a little."

"Your system runs on alcohol, Willy. You know that, don't you?"

"Don't all machines?"

"Myself, I could go for some eggs right now. How about you? What've we got left?" Martin went to the sink. It was full of floating dishes. "Hey, what the hell is it with the maid? We did remember to leave her a tip yesterday. Didn't we?"

"One of us must have."

That was it, then. That was why she had skipped them, and then snubbed him this morning. That had to be it. Didn't it?

The tape deck next door was now blaring a golden oldie by Steely Dan. Martin slid the glass door closed. Then he snagged his trousers from the back of a chair and put them on over his trunks. Started to put them on. They did not feel right. He patted his back pocket.

Will slid the door back open halfway. "You're serious, aren't you? Look at it this way. Leave it like this and the gas'll just blow on outside. Relax, man. That's what you came down here for, isn't it? After what happened, you need ..."

Martin checked the chair. On the table were a deck of playing cards from a Mission Bay savings and loan, the backs of which were imprinted with instructions about conserving energy, a Mexican wrestling magazine with a cover picture of the masked hero, El Santo, in the ring against a hooded character in red jumpsuit and horns, and an old mineral water bottle full of cigarette butts. On the floor, lying deflated between the

table legs, was his wallet.

"There's another reason, I'm afraid." Martin twisted open the empty wallet and showed it to his friend.

"Who in the hell...?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't the maid. Look at this place." Outside, a small local boy came trudging through the patios. He was carrying a leather case half as big as he was. He hesitated at the cabin on the south side, as three teen-aged American boys, their hair layered identically and parted in the middle, called their girls out in-to the sun. "It must have happened during the night."

"Christ!" said Will. He slapped the tabletop. He reached for his own wallet. It was intact. "There. I was over there partying all night, remember? They must've passed every place where anybody was still up."

The small boy opened his case and the American girls began poring excitedly over a display of Indian jewellery, rings and belt buckles and necklaces of bright tooled silver and turquoise. From a distance, an old man watched the boy and waited, nodding encouragement.

"You should have gone with me," said Will. "I told you. Well, don't you worry, Jack. I've got plenty here for both of us."

"No, man. I can wire my agent or -"

"Look," said Will, "I can even kite a cheque if I have to, to cover the rental till we get back. They'll go for it. I've been coming here since I was a kid."

I've got to get away from here, thought Martin. No, that isn't right. Where else is there to go? I've come this far already just to get away. It's hopeless. It always was. You can run, he told himself, but you can't hide. Why didn't I realize that?

"Here," said Will. "Here's twenty for now."

"Are you sure?"

"Don't worry about it. I'd better go see if the nurses got hit, too. Saw a bunch of people in a huddle down the beach a while ago." He drained his glass. "Then I'll make another beer run. The hell with it. We're going to party tonight, God damn it! You going by

the office, Jack?"

"Sure."

"Then you might as well report it to the old lady. I think she's got a son or a nephew in the federales. Maybe they can do something about it."

"Maybe," said Martin, cracking open a beer. He could have told Will that it wouldn't do any good. He stopped in at the office anyway. It didn't.

He wandered on up the highway to Enrique's Cafe. On the way he passed a squashed black cat, the empty skin of it in among the plants, the blood-red flowers and spotted adder's tongues and succulents by the roadside. The huevos rancheros were runny but good. When he got back, Will's four-wheel drive was still parked under the carport. He took the keys and made the beer run into town himself, police cars honking him out of the way to make left turns from right-hand lanes, zigzagging across the busy intersections of the city to avoid potholes. He bought a case of Dos Equis and, for forty cents more, a litre of soft, hot tortillas. As the afternoon wore on he found himself munching them, rolled with butter and later plain, even though he wasn't really hungry.

That evening he sat alone on a bench by the rocks, hearing but not listening to a Beatles song ('Treat Me Like You Did the Night Before'), the smoke from his Delicado wafting on the breeze, blending with wood smoke from the chimneys and rising slowly to leave a smear like the Milky Way across the Pleiades. It's time for me to leave this place, he thought. Not to run away, no, not this time; but to go back. And face the rest of it, my life, no matter how terrible things may have turned back home since I left.

Not Will, though; he should stay awhile longer if he likes. True, it was my idea; he only took the time off at my suggestion, setting it all up to make me comfortable; he knew I couldn't take any more last week, the way things were up there. He's my friend. Still, he was probably waiting for just such an excuse in order to get away himself.

So I'll call or wire the agency for a plane ticket, give them a cock-and-bull story about losing everything - the truth, in other words. It was the truth, wasn't it? I'll say the trip was part of the assignment. I had to come down here to work on some new sketches for the book, to follow a lead about headstone rubbings in, let's see, Guanajuato. Only I never made it that far. I stopped off for some local colour. Charge it against my royalty statement...I'll talk to them tomorrow. Yes, tomorrow.

Meanwhile, there's still to-night...

But I should tell Will first.

He resumed walking. There was a fire on the breakwater by the Point. He went toward it. Will would be in one of the cabins, partying with a vengeance. Martin glanced in one window. A slide show was in progress, with shots that looked like the pockmarked surface of another planet taken from space. He pressed closer and saw that these pictures were really close-ups of the faces of newborn seals or sea lions. Not that one, he thought, and moved on.

One of the parties he came to was in the big cabin two doors north of his own. That one was being rented, he remembered, by the producer of a show in the late seventies called *Starship Disco*. Martin had never seen it.

An Elvis Costello tape shook the walls. A young card hustler held forth around the living room table. A warm beer was pushed into Martin's hand by a girl. He popped the beer open and raised it, feeling his body stir as he considered her. Why not? But she could be my daughter, technically, he thought, couldn't she? Then: what a disgusting point of view. Then: what am I doing to myself? Then it was too late; she was gone.

Will was not in the back rooms. The shelf in the hallway held three toppling books. Well well, he thought, there are readers down here, after all. Then he examined them - *By Love Possessed* by Cozens, *Invitation to Tea* by Monica Lang (The People's Book Club, Chicago, 1952), *The Foundling* by Francis Cardinal Spellman. They were covered with years of dust.

He ducked into the bathroom and shut the door, seeing the mirror and razor blade lying next to the sink, the roll of randomly-perforated crepe paper toilet tissue. There was a knock on the door. He excused himself and went out, and found Will in the kitchen.

"*Dos cervezas*, Juan!" Will was shouting. "Whoa. I feel more like I do now than when I got here!" With some prodding, he grabbed two cold ones and followed Martin outside, rubbing his eyes.

He seemed relieved to sit down.

"So," began Martin. "What did you find out? Did anyone else get popped last night?"

"Plenty! One, the nurses. Two, the bitch from San Diego. Three, the - where is it now? Ojai. Those people. The..." He ran out of fingers. "Let's see. Anyway, there's plenty, let me tell you."

The ships were now even nearer the shore. Martin saw their black hulls closing in over the waves.

"I was thinking," he said.

"Maybe it's time to go. What would you say to that, man?"

"Nobody's running scared. That's not the way to play it. You should hear 'em talk. They'll get his ass next time, whoever he is. Believe it. The kids, they didn't get hit. But three of those other guys are rangers. Plus there's the cop. See the one in there with the hat? He says he's gonna lay a trap, cut the lights about three o'clock, everybody gets quiet, then bam! You better believe it. They're mad as hell."

"But why -"

"It's the dock strike. It happens every year when there's a layoff. The locals get hungry. They swoop down out of the hills like bats."

Just then a flaming object shot straight through the open front door and fizzled out over the water. There was a hearty "All r-r-ight!" from a shadow on the porch, and then the patio was filled with pogoing bodies and clapping hands. The night blossomed with matches and fireworks, 1000-foot skyrockets, bottle rockets and volleys of Mexican cherry bombs, as the party moved outside and chose up sides for a firecracker war. Soon Martin could no longer hear himself think.

He waited it out. Will was laughing.

Martin scanned the beach beneath the screaming lights. And noticed something nearby that did not belong. It was probably a weird configuration of kelp, but...he got up and investigated.

It was only this: a child's broken doll, wedged half-under the stones. What had he supposed it was? It had been washed in on the tide, or deliberately dismembered and its parts strewn at the waterline, he could not tell which. In the flickering explosions, its rusty eye sockets appeared to be streaked with tears.

A minute after it had begun, the firecracker war was over. They sat apart from the cheering and breaking bottles, watching the last shot of a Roman candle sizzle below the surface of the water like a green torpedo. There was scattered applause, and then a cry went up from another party house down the beach as a new round of fireworks was launched there. Feet slapped the sand, dodging rocks.

"Do you really believe that?"

"What?"

"About someone coming down from the hills," said Martin. *Like bats.* He shuddered.

"Watch this," said Will. He took his bottle and threw it into the air, snapping it so it flew directly at a palm tree thirty feet away. It smashed into the trunk at the ragged trim line.

Instantly the treetop began to tremble. There was a high rustling and a shaking and a scurrying. And a rattling of tiny claws. A jagged frond dropped spearlike to the beach.

"See that? It's rats. The trees around here are full of 'em. You see how bushy it is on top? It never gets trimmed up there. Those rats are born, live and die in the trees. They never touch down."

"But how? I mean, what do they eat if -?"

"Dates. Those are palm trees, remember? And each other, probably. You've never seen a dead one on the ground, have you?"

Martin admitted he hadn't.

"Not that way with the bats, though. They have to come out at

night. Maybe they even hit the rats. I never saw that. But they have mouths to feed, don't they? There's nothing much to eat up in the hills. It must be the same with the peasants. They have families. Wouldn't you?"

"I hate to say this. But. You did lock up, didn't you?"

Will laughed drily. "Come on. I've got something for you. I think it's time you met the nurses."

Martin made a quick sidetrip to check the doors at their place, and they went on. They covered the length of the beach before Will found the porch he was looking for. Martin reached out to steady his friend, and almost fell himself. He was getting high. It was easy.

As they let themselves in, the beach glimmered at their backs with crushed abalone shells and scuttling hermit crabs. Beyond the oil tankers, the uncertain outline of the island loomed in the bay. It was called Dead Man's Island, Will told him.

HE WOKE with the sensation that his head was cracking open. Music or something like it in the other room, throbbing through the thin walls like the pounding of surf. Voices. An argument of some kind. He brushed at the cobwebs. He had been lost in a nightmare of domination and forced acquiescence before people who meant to do him harm. It returned to him in fragments. What did it mean? He shook it off and rolled out of bed.

There was the floor he had pressed with his hand last night to stop the room from spinning. There was the nurse, tangled in the sheets next to him. He guessed she was the nurse. He couldn't see her face.

He went into the bathroom. He took a long draught of water from the tap before he came out. He raised his head and the room spun again. The light from the window hurt his eyes - actual physical pain. He couldn't find his sock. He tottered into the other room.

A young man with blown-dry hair was playing the tape deck too loudly. The sound vibrated the bright air, which seemed thin and brittle, hammering it like beaten silver. There was the girl in the blue tank

top, still seated next to the smouldering fireplace. An empty bottle of Damiana Liqueur was balanced against her thigh. Her eyes were closed and her face was stony. He wondered if she had slept that way, propped upright all night. On the table were several Parker Brothers-type games from stateside: *Gambler*, *Creature Features*, *The Game of Life*. A deck of Gaiety Brand nudie cards, with a picture on the box of a puppy pulling a bikini top out of a purse. Someone had been playing solitaire. Martin couldn't remember.

There was a commotion outside. "What's that?" he said, shielding his eyes.

"Talking Heads," said the young man. He showed Martin the tape box. "They're pretty good. That lead guitar line is hard to play. It's so repetitious."

"No, I mean..."

Martin scratched and went into the kitchen. It was unoccupied, except for a cricket chirping somewhere behind the refrigerator. Breakfast was in process; eggs were being scrambled in a blender the nurses had brought with them from home. Martin protected his eyes again and looked outside.

There was Will. And there were three or four tan beach boys from the other party. And the cop. He wasn't doing his leg exercises this morning. They were having an argument.

Martin stumbled out.

"But you can't do that," one of them was saying.

"Stay cool, okay, motherfuck? You want the whole beach to know?"

"You think they don't already?"

"The hell they do! We drug him over out of the way. No one'll -"

"No one but the maids!"

"That's what I'm saying. You guys are a bunch of jack-offs. Jesus Christ! I'm about this close to kicking your ass right now, do you know that?"

"All right, all right!" said Will. "That kind of talk's just digging us in deeper. Now let's run through the facts. One -"

Martin came up. They shot looks at each other that both startled him and made him unreasonably afraid for their safety as well as his own.

They stopped talking, their eyes wild, as if they had gobbled a jar of Mexican amphetamines.

Will took him aside.

"We've got to do something!" said the one with the souvenir hat. "What're you -?"

"Hold on," said Will. "We're all in this together, like it or -"

"I'm not the one who -"

"- Like it or not. Now just try to keep a tight asshole another minute, will you, while I talk to my friend Jack? It's his neck, too."

They started back up the beach. Will propelled him ahead of the others, as to a rendezvous of great urgency.

"They got him," said Will.

"Who?"

"The thief, whoever he was. Poor bastard. Two guys from next door cornered him outside our place. Sometime around dawn, the way I get it. Apparently he fell on the rocks. He's dead. They found me here a little while ago. Now -"

"What?"

"- Now there's no use shitting bricks. It's done. What we have to do is think of a way to put ourselves in the clear - fast. We're the strangers here."

"We can make it look like an accident," said the one in the hat. "Those rocks are -"

"Accident, hell," said the security cop. "It was self-defense, breaking and entering. We caught him and blew him away. No court in -"

"This isn't the USA, you dumb shit. You know what greaser jails are like? They hate our guts. All they want's our money. This buddy of mine, he got..."

And so it went till they reached the porch, the surrounding beach littered with the casings of burnt-out rockets, vomit drying on the rocks, broken clam shells bleaching between the rocks, the rocks like skulls. And here blood, vivid beyond belief even on the bricks of the patio, great splotches and gouts of it, like gold coins burnished in the sun, a trail that led them in the unforgiving light of day to the barbecue pit and the pile of kindling stacked in the

charcoal shade.

Martin knelt and tore at the logs.

And there.

The body was hidden inside a burlap sack. It was the body of the boy who had come by yesterday, the boy who had wanted to sell his jewellery.

He felt his stomach convulse. The small face was scraped raw, the long eyelashes caked and flaking, the dark skin driven from two of the ribs to show white muscle and bone. A great fear overtook Martin, like wings settling upon him, blocking out the sun. He folded under them momentarily and dry-heaved in the ashes.

Will was pacing the narrow patio like a prisoner in a cell, legs pumping out and back over the cracking cement, pivoting faster and faster at the edges until he was practically spinning, generating a hopeless rage that would not be denied but could not be released. His hands were shaking violently, and his arms and shoulders and body. He looked around with slitted eyes, chin out, lips drawn in, jaws grinding stone. From far down the beach by the Point an elderly man came walking, hesitating at each house and searching each lot. He was carrying a leather case.

Will said, "You kicked him to death, didn't you? You stomped this child until he was dead." Then, his voice a hiss, he began to curse them between his teeth with an unspeakable power and vileness. The one in the hat tried to break in. He started shouting.

"It was dark! He could've been anyone! What was he doing creepin' around here? He could've been -"

But Will was upon him, his arms corded, his fingers going for the throat. The others closed in. People on the beach were turning to stare. Martin saw it all as if in slow motion: himself rising at last to his full height, leaping into it a split-second before the others could grab hold, as he fell on their arms to stop the thumbs from Will's eyes, to break Will's hands from the other's throat. Everything stopped. Martin stepped between them as the young one fell back to

the flagstone wall. Martin raised his right hand, flattened and angled it like a knife. With his left he cupped the back of the young man's neck, holding it almost tenderly. The young man's eyes were almost kind. They were eyes Martin had seen all his life, outside recruiting offices and Greyhound bus depots the years over, and they were a law unto themselves. He brought his right hand down sharp and hard across the face, again, again, three times, like pistol shots. The tan went white, then red where he had slapped it. For a moment nobody said anything. The old man kept coming.

THEY passed motorcycle cops, overheated VW's, Jeeps, Chevy Luvs, Ford Couriers with camper shells, off-road vehicles with heavy-duty shocks and, a mile outside of town, a half-acre of pastel gravestones by the main road. Martin fit as best he could among the plastic water jugs, sleeping bags and Instamatic cameras in the back seat. The boys from next door were piled in with him, the one in the hat in front and Will at the controls of the four-wheel drive.

The twenty-mile access road behind Ensenada wound them higher and higher, pummeling them continuously until they were certain that the tie rods or the A-frame or their bodies would shake loose and break apart at the very next turn. The lane shrank to a mere dirt strip, then to a crumbling shale-and-sandstone ledge cut impossibly around the backs of the hills, a tortuous serpentine above abandoned farmland and the unchecked acreage between the mountains and the sea. Twice at least one of the wheels left the road entirely; they had to pile out and lay wild branches under the tires to get across fissures that had no bottom. Martin felt his kidneys begin to ache under the endless pounding. One of the boys threw up and continued to retch over the side until Will decided they had gone far enough, but no one opened his mouth to complain. After more than an hour, they set the hand brake at the start of a primitive downslope, blocked the wheels with granite chips and stum-

bled the rest of the way, numb and reeling.

The silence was overpowering. Nothing moved, except for the random scrabbling of lizards and the falling of individual leaves and blades of grass. As they dragged the sack down to the meadows, Martin concentrated on the ribbon of dirt they had driven, watching for the first sign of another car, however unlikely that was. A small, puddled heat mirage shimmered on the dust, coiled and waiting to be splashed. A squirrel darted across the road, silhouetted as it paused in stop-motion, twitched its pointed head and then ran on, disappearing like an escaped shooting gallery target. Great powdered monarch butterflies aimlessly swam the convection currents; like back home, he thought. Yes, of course; I should have known. Only too much like home.

"Dig here," said Will.

The old wound in Martin's foot was hurting him again. He had thought it would be healed by now, but it wasn't. He rocked back wearily on one heel. A withered vine caught at his ankle. It snapped easily with a dull, fleshy sound as he shook free. He took another step, and something moist and solid broke underfoot. He looked down.

He kicked at the grass. It was only a tiny melon, one of dozens scattered nearby and dying on the vine. He rolled it over, revealing its soft underbelly. Too much rain this season, he thought absently; too much or too little, nourishing them excessively or not enough. What was the answer? He picked it up and lobbed it over their heads. It splattered on the road in a burst of pink. Watermelons, he thought, while fully-formed seeds pale as unborn larvae slithered off his shoe and into the damp grass. Who planted them here? And who will return for the harvest, only to find them already gone to seed? He stooped and wiped his hand. There was a faint but unmistakable throb and murmur in the ground, as though through a railroad track, announcing an unseen approach from miles away. "What are you going to do, Jackie?"

Martin stared back at Will. He

hadn't expected the question, not now.

"It's like this," said Will, taking him to one side. "Michael, for one, wants to get back to his own van and head on deeper into Baja, lay low for a few days. He wasn't registered, so there's no connection. Some of the others sound like they're up for the same, or for going north right away, tonight. Kevin's due to check out today, anyway."

"And you?"

"Don't know yet. I haven't decided. I'll probably stay on for appearances, but you do what you want. I wouldn't worry about the maid or anyone coming by to check up. Anyway, we hosed off the patio. Nobody else saw a thing, I'm sure. The girls don't know anything about it."

There was a grunt. The sack, being lowered, had split open at the seams. Hands hurried to reclose it.

"What's that?"

Will grabbed a wrist. A silver bracelet inlaid with polished turquoise glittered against a bronze tan in the afternoon light.

"I - I bought it."

"Sure you did," said Will.

"I brought it with me on the trip. Ask my girl. She -"

Will stripped it off the arm and flung it into the shallow grave. "You want to get out of this alive, kiddo? That kind of work can be traced. Or didn't you think of that? You didn't think, did you? What else did you steal from him while you were at it yesterday? Is that why he came back last night? Is it?"

"Lookit, man, where do you get off -"

"We all hang together," said Will, "or we all hang together. Get it?"

He got to his knees to close the sack. As an afterthought, he reached deep and rifled the dead child's pockets for anything that might tie in with Quintas Papagayo.

His hands stopped. He withdrew a wad of paper money which fell open, a flower on his palm. A roll of American dollars, traveller's cheques, credit cards.

"Hey, that's -"

"I had eighty bucks on me when -"

Martin joined him in examining the roll. The cheques were signed NORMAN & BERNICE WINSLOW. Two of the cards, embossed on the front and signed on the back, read JACK MARTIN.

"Knew I was right!" said the one in the felt hat. "Fuck if I wasn't! Lookit that! The little son of a bitch..."

MARTIN straight-armed the wheel, running in darkness.

He reminded himself of the five-dollar bill clipped to the back of his license. Then he remembered that his wallet was flat, except for the credit cards. Motorcycle cops passed him like fugitive Hell's Angels. He kicked on the lights of his rented car and thought of the last news tape of the great Karl Wallenda. He had been running, too, though in wind, not fog, toward or away from something.

Did he look back, I wonder? Was that why it happened?

...Heading for the end, his last that day was weak. Or maybe he looked ahead that once, saw it was the same, and just gave up the ghost. No, not Wallenda. For him the game was running while pretending not to - or the other way around. Was that his private joke? Even in Puerto Rico, for him the walk was all. *Keep your head clear*, he wanted to tell Wallenda. For that was how it finished, stopping to consider. But Wallenda must have known; he had been walking for years. Still he should have

remembered...Martin put on his brights, gripped the steering wheel and made for the border.

He turned on the radio, found an American station.

It was playing a song by a group called The Tubes. He remembered the Tivoli Night Club, the elevated band playing 'Around the World' and 'A Kiss to Build a Dream On.' He remembered Hussong's Cantina, the knife fight that happened, his trip to the Blow Hole, policia with short hair and semiautomatic rifles. The housetrailer parked on the Point, the Point obscured by mist. The military guns with silencers...

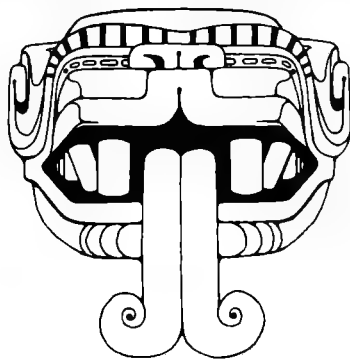
The doll whose parts had been severed, its eyes opening in moonlight.

Shaking, he turned his mind to what lay ahead. He wanted to see someone; he tried to think of her face. Her eyes would find his there under the beam ceiling, the spider plants in the corners growing into the carpet, the waves on Malibu beach, the Pleiades as bright, shining on what was below: the roots between the rocks, the harbour lights like eyes, the anemones closed inward, the gourds and giant mushrooms, the endless pull of riptide, the seagulls white as death's-heads, the police with trimmed moustaches, the dark ships at anchor...

He came to a bridge on the toll-way. Ahead lay the border.

To his right a sign, a turnoff that would take him back into Baja.

He sat with the motor running, trying to pick a direction.



Since 1960, Dennis Etchison has sold to a variety of periodicals - mainstream and fantasy - including *F&SF*, *Fantastic*, *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, *Rogue*, *Cavalier*, *Whispers*, *Weirdbook*, *Comet* (Germany), *Fiction* (France) and a number of others. His stories have also been snapped up by original and reprint anthologists in the fantasy genre, with *New Writings in SF*, *Whispers I* and *II*, *New Terrors I*, *Frights*, *First World Fantasy Awards*, *Year's Best Horror Stories* and *Shadows* being just a selection of titles. As for novels, Dennis published two in the '60s (not under his own name) and more recently his novelization of John Carpenter's film *The Fog* has become a best-seller. He has several screenplays to his credit - *The Fox and the Forest* from the Ray Bradbury story, Stephen King's *The Mist* and one for Dino de Laurentiis called *The Ogre*. Dennis is also re-writing a Colin Wilson script and an original, *They*, based on his own story *The Late Shift*. Upcoming yarns are due to appear in *Whispers*, *Weirdbook 15*, *Whispers III* anthology, *Horror and Terrors* (both Playboy Press) and *Year's Best Horror Stories IX* (Daw). Future plans include more short tales and compiling a collection of his own work. We are happy to have published *The Dark Country* and brought his powerful and unusual style of horror to our pages for the first time.

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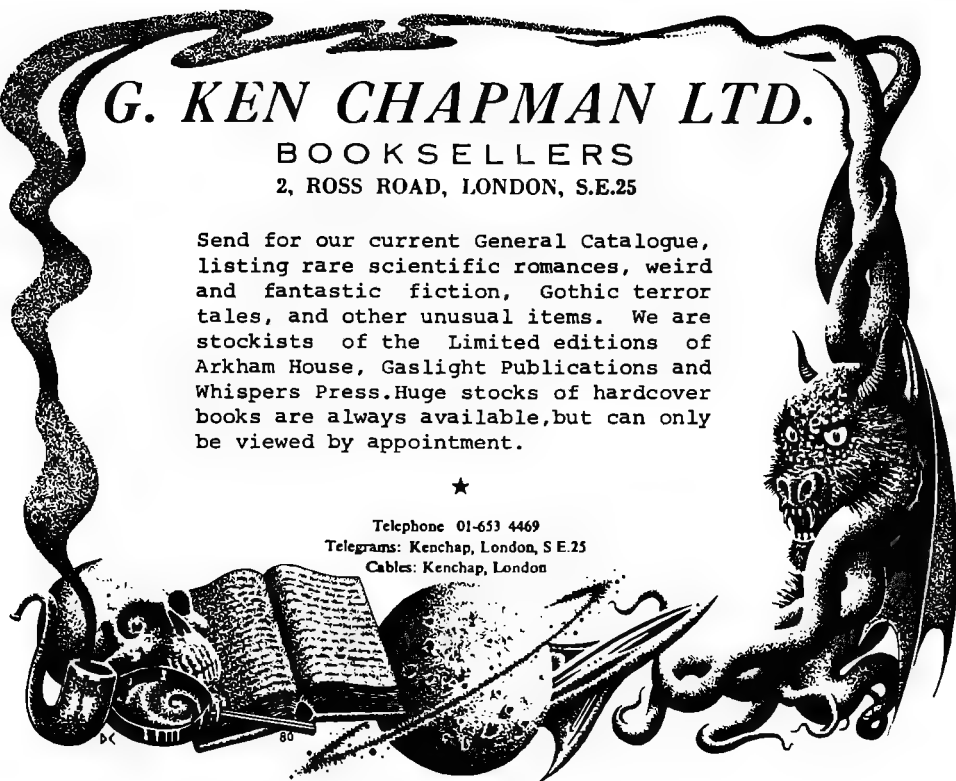
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"You believe there is no such creature as a zombi, eh?"

A Place of No Return

By HUGH B. CAVE

Illustration by DAVE CARSON

AS PROFESSOR Leslie Carter understood it, there were two kinds of zombies in the Republic of Haiti, and he didn't believe in either.

Accepted even by some of the educated elite was a theory that zombies could be produced through the use of poison. Formula: administer one of several potions known to be capable of inducing a physical condition resembling death. Remove the body from its grave immediately after burial. Revive it. And you had a living creature with a damaged mind who could be trained as a canefield labourer, a household servant, et cetera.

The barefoot peasant believed

in zombies of another kind, however, in dead persons brought back to life by a kind of sorcery practised by *bocors*, whose services were always for sale if one had sufficient money.

"So what I want you to do for me, Dieudonne," said Carter to the old black man standing before him on the pension veranda, "is take me to where I can see some zombies and talk to them. Do you understand?"

The old man hesitated.

"I am a learned man," Carter continued patiently. "I teach anthropology, the science of man and his beliefs, in a renowned American university. And though I am here

in your country on a vacation, I look upon my visit as an opportunity to determine once and for all whether zombies really exist." Smilingly he repeated his favourite phrase: "Do you understand?"

Dieudonne Malfam solemnly nodded. Having worked for years for a Catholic priest in the village of his birth, he understood Carter's words. All but the hard ones, anyway. He was not sure, however, that he understood what was meant by them.

"Do you have time enough, *m'sieu*, to go with me into the mountains?"

"How much time will it require?"

"Well, if we leave now, we can be in Furcy by mid-afternoon. There we must leave the jeep and walk awhile. You are not against walking?"

Carter had to smile. He was at least twenty years younger than the man who seemed to be questioning his fitness, and at the Ivy League university where he taught he had been jogging at least five miles a day for the past two years. "I can walk."

"These will be difficult mountain trails, *m'sieu*."

"No more so for me than for you. Where will we be sleeping?"

"I will arrange a bed for you. Have no fear."

"All right," Carter said. "Just give me a few minutes to make ready." And, striding boldly through the pension's drawing room to show the old peasant how well he could walk, he leaped up the stairs two at a time to go to his room.

In the upper hall he encountered the pension's Haitian proprietor, round little Claude Jeannot, and Jeannot said, beaming, "Ah, Professor Carter. Will the man I obtained for you be satisfactory, do you think?"

"I hope so. I've decided to give him a try."

"It was not simple, you know," the proprietor said. "With you speaking no Creole, you had to have someone who spoke English well enough to understand you. Also someone with a vehicle, for you said you did not wish the expense of a separate car and driver,

remember."

"Dieudonne came in a jeep."

"He owns it."

"How could such a man afford to buy a jeep, Jeannot?"

"He has ways of acquiring things, it seems. At any rate, he makes a living with it."

"How?"

"Well, you are paying him for his services, are you not?"

"We've agreed on two hundred dollars."

"A thousand *gourdes*, eh? For that he should certainly find you some zombies, *m'sieu*."

"He'd better," Carter said darkly. "Will he, do you think?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"It's just that he seems - well, not too bright." But then, Carter thought, no one he had yet encountered in this Caribbean land of voodoo, sorcery and zombies had seemed really bright. Perhaps he was expecting too much.

In his room Carter tossed into a small overnight bag the few items he thought he might need, added his camera, then counted the money in his billfold. He had a little more than the two hundred American dollars required for Dieudonne. The rest of his money, in traveller's cheques, was locked in the pension safe.

Returning to the ground floor, he found his guide waiting outside in the jeep. The vehicle had seen better days, he observed as he climbed into it. Still, it was probably as clean as some small boy with a rag and a bucket of water had been able to make it. Depositing his bag in the back, he said, "Aren't you taking anything, Dieudonne?"

"I need nothing, *m'sieu*."

"These people know you? The ones we're going to?"

"They know me."

"Well, then," Carter said loudly, unable to suppress his excitement, "let's get going, man!"

FROM the sweltering August heat of Port-au-Prince they first climbed the steep, curving road to Petionville, then the even steeper one to the mountain village of Kenscoff. On the unpaved, almost

vertical ladder from there to Furcy, Carter found himself fiercely clinging to various parts of the vehicle as though he were riding a bucking horse.

He had not been to Furcy before. After the shock of the road, which left him nearly breathless, came the awesome view from the height his guide told him was called La Decouverte - The Discovery. "*Deye morne ge morne*," the old man murmured, quoting an old Haitian proverb. "Beyond the mountains are mountains." These, in range after misty range, filled a wilderness extending all the way to the Caribbean Sea.

Now began the walking.

It was not, after all, quite the same as jogging through an Ivy League campus. True, the sea-level heat of Port-au-Prince was gone now, but the trail they followed was demanding. It descended so steeply at times that Carter had to cling to anything his fingers could reach. Then it invariably reversed itself to climb so steeply that he had to crawl.

The old man plodded on without comment, but looked back occasionally to make sure he was being followed. After an hour or so he indicated they should rest.

"You are all right, *m'sieu?*"

"Of course. I'm not used to this kind of hiking, that's all. How much farther have we to go?"

"Two, three hours."

"Well, don't worry about me. I can do anything you can."

When they stopped again, Carter prolonged the resting time by probing a little into his companion's background. "How," he asked, "did you happen to be given that odd name Dieudonne? It means God-given, doesn't it?"

The old fellow nodded. "My mother had wanted a child for many years. When it finally happened, she called me that to show her gratitude."

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, here and there in these mountains. Or in the capital. Or elsewhere, when it suits me."

"You have no real home, you mean?"

"My home, *m'sieu*, is where I

happen to be at the moment."

Feeling the mountain stillness like a spell, Carter looked about him and said, frowning, "Doesn't anyone live in these hills?"

"A few, *m'sieu*. Not many."

"We haven't seen a single village."

"There are none. Only - well, you will see. Very few visitors come here, of course."

That must be true, Carter thought with satisfaction. No mere tourist would ever do what he was doing. It would be something for him to talk about when he returned to the States. He must instruct his wife to organize an evening for him to tell about it. His colleagues, her friends among the faculty wives. He would show his colour slides. With luck he would have some pictures of "zombies" - to prove they were not zombies at all.

He spoke about them to his guide when they stopped again to rest - a badly needed halt this time for Carter who was nearing exhaustion. "Tell me, Dieudonne - what does a zombi look like?"

The old man sat on a fallen pine tree and picked his nose.

"Like you and me, *m'sieu*."

"Are they dead?"

"Dead but alive."

"If they look like living persons, how can you know they're zombies?"

"There are signs, *m'sieu*. A lostness in the eyes. A foul smell about them. The way they walk and talk."

"They can talk?"

"In their own way. Not our way."

From the boulder onto which he had gratefully lowered his aching body Carter said, "I think you're putting me on, old man."

"Pardon, *m'sieu?*"

"There is no such thing as a zombi. We both know it."

"Would you also say, *m'sieu*, there is no such thing as a *bocor?*"

"Oh, there are sorcerers. I believe that. But their powers are vastly exaggerated. They can't make zombies."

"Should we turn back, then, *m'sieu?*" Dieudonne asked softly.

"No, no. We've come this far;

we'll see it through."

Half-an-hour later they arrived.

As the old man had warned, it was not a village. The trail wriggled down to a patch of almost level mountainside about two acres in extent, and on the level stood a dozen widely separated huts with wattle-and-daub walls and thatch roofs. Most of the ground not given up to the huts was used for growing vegetables. "These people carry produce to the Iron Market in Port-au-Prince," Dieudonne explained. "Beyond the houses, where the land is less level, the gardens are larger."

"And that is where the zombies are employed?"

"I see that you know more about my people than you have led me to believe, *m'sieu*."

"I warned you I was a man of learning," Carter retorted as they trudged side by side toward the largest hut.

"Ah, yes, so you did."

"And let me warn you now not to try deceiving me about these zombies, friend. If they are not the real thing, you won't be paid, I promise you."

The old Haitian shot him a sidelong glance out of eyes resembling black opals, but offered no retort.

Outside the hut Dieudonne halted. The door was open but he rapped on it with his bony black knuckles.

"*Honneur, compere*," he called out.

"It is Dieudonne."

A tall, muscular man of middle age appeared in the doorway, blending with the gloom behind him because the hut had no windows.

"*Respect, compere*," he murmured, then offered Carter a smile of hospitality and spoke in Creole.

Dieudonne answered in the same peasant tongue and, turning to Carter, explained in English, "Ti-Jean asked who you are, and I have told him you are a man of great learning from America. I said you are here to talk to his zombies and take some photographs."

"Good. Is he the one who owns the zombies?"

"He is the leader here."

"Where does he find them? I want to know that, too."

The old man's shoulders eloquently rose and fell. "Such a question is not to be asked, *m'sieu*."

"From some local *bocor*, I suppose," Carter persisted with a smile that was half smirk.

"Perhaps. But let me talk to him now about a place for you to sleep tonight." Again Dieudonne addressed the muscular man in Creole.

The reply came without hesitation, and the old man was obviously pleased. "There is an empty house you may use," he said. "The man and woman who live there went to the capital with produce yesterday and will not return till Monday. Come, please."

The hut in question was smaller than Ti-Jean's and had for furniture only a table, two chairs and a bed, all crudely handmade of the Carribbean pine that grew in these mountains. Carter examined the bed and was not happy with its grass-filled mattress and soiled blanket, but was at this point too tired to reject it. "I believe I'll just rest a little before we do anything else, Dieudonne."

"Of course, *m'sieu*."

"Don't let me sleep too long, now. I want to see those zombies at work!"

"I doubt they are working this late, *m'sieu*."

"What do you mean, late? They work all the time, I've read."

"Perhaps on moonlit nights, *m'sieu*. But there will be no moon tonight, and the day is already dying."

Seated on the bed, Carter paused in the act of removing his shoes to look out the open door. Seen through tall pines on a western ridge, the setting sun was a fiery crimson ball that bloodied all in its reach. The day *was* nearly over, he realized. They had walked for an eternity to get here. No wonder he felt an irresistible yearning to sleep.

He lay back and closed his eyes, and knew no more until a sound of drumming awoke him.

The glowing hands of the watch on his wrist said midnight.

Having fallen asleep fully

dressed except for his shoes, he had only to put the shoes back on before angrily jerking the hut door open to look for the source of the drumming. He hadn't far to look. In an open space among the peasant houses, glowing lanterns hung from the horizontal branches of a solitary mapou - a tree supposed to possess magical powers, he knew from his extensive reading. Among the mapou's buttressed roots, on a low stool, sat the drummer.

It was the man who, according to Dieudonne, owned the zombies.

In the space lit by the lanterns some twenty persons were dancing, if one could properly call it dancing. They moved in procession very slowly with their knees bent and their shoulders undulating. A voodoo thing? He had read about certain voodoo dances - the *yanvalou*, for instance - but had no way of knowing what this was. At any rate, it was damned inconsiderate of them to be holding such a noisy affair at midnight when they had an important guest so badly in need of sleep.

As Dieudonne had predicted, there was no moon in the black-velvet sky. He was not noticed as he left his doorway and strode toward the dancers. Only when he marched into the lanternlight were they aware of his intrusion.

The drumming dribbled away to silence. The dancing slowed and stopped. Carter went straight to the drummer, in such a way that some of the performers had to stumble out of his path.

"Do you *have* to do this tonight?" he demanded. The fellow spoke no English, of course, but perhaps the anger in his voice...

Suddenly old Dieudonne appeared at his side. "Something is wrong, *m'sieu*?"

"Of course something is wrong! If I'm to pay these people for a night's sleep here, I want to sleep! Tell him that!"

"*M'sieu*," the old man gently protested, "this is a thing they do at times to insure that the crops -"

"I know that, I know it! At

least, I can guess. But let them do it after I'm gone!"

Dieudonne gazed at him in silence for a few seconds, perhaps attempting to decide just how resolute he might be. Then, with a shrug, he turned to the man at the drum. Squatting, which made him no taller than the drum itself, he spoke almost inaudibly into Ti-Jean's ear.

Ti-Jean, too, regarded Carter in silence. Then he rose, swung the drum up under an arm, and with a command in Creole to the dancers, walked off toward his hut.

The dancers drifted away into the darkness.

Carter, satisfied, returned to his hut and slept undisturbed until daybreak.

At dawn he washed his face in a basin of water that had been placed on the table while he slept. It would be a nice day for what he had to do, he observed. The sky was clear, the mountain air crisp and clean. Opening his overnight bag, he took out his camera and checked it. Now if Dieudonne could produce some zombies...

But, of course, they would not be zombies. He already knew what they would be, in a remote clan community such as this. Even his students at the university could be expected to know.

Dieudonne came with some breakfast for him - a white enamelled dish containing what appeared to be roasted yams and boiled green plantains; a cup of some sort of bush tea.

"Thanks," Carter said, "but if you don't mind, I'd like to get on with what we came here for. I'm not hungry." Nor was he - for a breakfast such as that.

"You wish to visit the zombies now, *m'sieu*?"

"That's the idea."

"Very well. Come." And Dieudonne led him through the settlement to the mountain-slope fields beyond.

Carter was surprised at the extent of these. In carefully constructed terraces they descended for what seemed a good half mile: fields of cabbages, turnips, car-

rots, sweet potatoes, scallions, yam vines climbing forests of slender poles. Far down near the bottom a dozen or so figures could be seen at work, spread out in a line. The bright early sunlight flashed on tools of some sort that rose and fell in unison.

"This path will take us down to them," Dieudonne said. "Come."

Bare feet had worn the path almost as smooth and hard as troweled concrete, Carter observed as he descended through the switchbacks. Years of labour must have gone into these fields. But, of course, when the produce was headed down to the capital it must bring in a handsome return. Don't underestimate these people, he told himself, even though they seem to live in a world apart.

Suddenly he became aware of the smell.

It was like...well, what was it like? The first thing that came to mind was the acrid stench of bat guano in a wild Kentucky cave he had once explored. Next, the stink of a pig farm near his sister's rural home in Vermont. A distressing odour, it rode the light breeze here like a chemical cloud, assailing not only his nostrils but his mind.

Halting, he said to his guide, "My God, man, don't they ever wash?"

"They see no need to."

"Oh, come on. You know as well as I do they're not dead men!"

"If you wish to go closer, *m'sieu*, the smell must be endured."

Negotiating the last switchback, they reached the level on which the men were working. Still in a row, the toilers in unison lifted huge, heavy hoes above their heads and brought them down to send the reddish earth flying in clods. All were barefoot, Carter observed. All were barechested. The sole garment of each was a pair of black trousers, earth-stained and worn.

And that awful stench!

"How do they stand one another?" he demanded. "Where do they sleep at night?"

"There," the old man said, pointing to a long, thatch-roofed shelter where the cleared part of

the mountainside became forest. It had no walls.

"Don't they feel the cold? It must be really cold up here at times."

"They have few feelings." Dieudonne seemed a trifle impatient. "Perhaps you can take your pictures now, *m'sieu*?"

"No! I must go closer."

"As you wish."

Carter would not let the smell stop him. Not until he stood within three feet of the nearest worker did he halt. About twenty years old, with a face that was not black but oddly grey and wore an expression of eternal sadness, the creature paid him absolutely no attention.

Carter studied him and then, trying not to inhale too much of that abominable odour, moved on down the line to scrutinize the others. He took pictures, changed the film, took more. Old Dieudonne resignedly waited for him. Then in silence they toiled back up the mountainside.

In the clearing some of the inhabitants of that lost-world community stood in their doorways watching. Wondering, Carter decided, how he would react to having been made a fool of. Well...he would show them.

Inside the hut in which he had spent the night he angrily confronted his guide. "All right, Dieudonne. I was stupid to come here - all this way for nothing. But you were even more stupid to bring me, if you expect to be paid!"

Dieudonne eyed him in apparent surprise. "*M'sieu*?"

"Zombies, ha! I'm an anthropologist, not a gullible tourist! Those men in the fields aren't dead; they're just a result of the inbreeding that's been going on in this place. They're idiots, morons, imbeciles, without any intelligence. What's needed here is some new blood."

"*M'sieu*," Dieudonne said, his dark eyes seeming to smoulder, "I say those men are zombies, and I brought you here in good faith."

"You're a liar."

"I am a truthful man, *m'sieu*."

"Oh, all right, I'll pay you

something for your trouble. Not the two hundred we agreed on, but something."

"Thank you, *m'sieu*."

"I'll give you twenty."

"What, *m'sieu*?"

"You ought to be grateful! You know damned well you've played me for a dupe!"

"Very well," Dieudonne said, turning away. "I will get us something to eat, and then we can start back." At the door he paused to fix his gaze on the American's face for a moment. "I am sorry you think me dishonest, *m'sieu*. In time you will believe otherwise."

He disappeared, but in fifteen minutes was back with food and drink on a wooden tray. Transferring the dishes to the table, he motioned Carter to begin. The food this time was chicken and sweet potatoes. The drink was again some kind of tea.

"What's in this?" Carter demanded, tapping his cup with a finger-nail.

"We make it from leaves of the corossol tree, *m'sieu*. The soursop. It is good." To show how good it was, the old man drank some of his own.

"I dislike bush teas," Carter said. And at the moment also distrust them, he added mentally. Rejecting the sweet potatoes too, he attacked the chicken, discovering he was ravenous.

Finished, he rose and looked about the room to make certain he had forgotten nothing. Opened his overnight bag on the bed to be sure it contained his camera. Glancing at the old man, who was still leisurely eating, he said irritably, "Well, are you ready?" He was not looking forward to the long walk back to the jeep.

"Yes, *m'sieu*, I am ready," Dieudonne said, pushing away his plate with his portion of the chicken untouched.

"Let's get out of here, then," Carter grumbled, and turned to the door.

Something happened to the doorway as he went toward it. Its outlines blurred. From a rectangle of brilliant sunlight it became one of swirling mist, then of

total darkness. He felt himself falling but had no sensation of reaching the floor. The fall simply continued, as into a bottomless black pit.

Time passed - unmeasurable - and he was on the bed. The room was the same but blurred, as though seen through thick green glass. He was naked. There was no feeling in his hands, his feet - none, really, in his entire body. Near by stood the old man on whom a grateful mother had bestowed the name Dieudonne, holding in his hands a pair of trousers and lifting from them a billfold. "Thief!" Carter silently screamed. Now the old man was removing money from the billfold and counting it. And again, "Thief!" Carter shouted, but knew he was only thinking the word, not voicing it.

Into the hut came the man they had first spoken with in this terrible place. He and Dieudonne conversed but their talk was in Creole and Carter could not understand it, was not even sure he was hearing it. A wad of paper money was thrust into old Dieudonne's hand - Haitian money this time, not American - and the old man stuffed it into his pocket along with what he had removed from the billfold. "*Merci*, Ti-Jean," he said, and then, "*Adieu*." The two solemnly shook hands.

Turning then, Dieudonne came to the bed and looked down at Carter, who saw him only through veiled eyes. "And *adieu* to you also, *m'sieu*," he said. "You believe there is no such creature as a zombi, eh? And that your belief makes it right for you to cheat a poor old *bocor*. Oh, but I forget - the powers of a sorcerer are greatly exaggerated, you said. And, of course, you know because you are a man of learning."

With a nod to the man who had paid him, he walked out of the hut. The other stepped to the doorway after him but halted there and spoke to someone outside.

The two men who shuffled into the hut then were naked except for black, earth-stained trousers, and they stank. They lifted Carter from the bed and set him on his feet.

With a muttered command that sounded like "Vini!" they walked him to the door, then across the compound, then down the hard, red-earth path he had travelled earlier with Dieudonne to take pictures of them and their companions.

Holding him between them, they escorted him to the thatched shelter in which, according to Dieudonne, the workers were housed at night. The floor was a bed of dried grass. They pushed him and he sprawled face first onto it and once more felt himself falling, falling, falling into a pit of blackness that had no bottom.

When he awoke this time, or drifted into what passed for wakefulness, dawn was breaking over the mountains.

Full of despair, he sat up and looked about him and saw he was not alone. More than a dozen others shared the shelter with him. The muscular peasant leader called Ti-Jean stood there making pistol-shot sounds with a bullwhip and snarling commands. Some of the men who had been dancing last night flanked him.

With the other workers Carter staggered to his feet. Someone had handed him a wooden bowl filled with grey, watery gruel from a

black iron pot. Taking his cue from his companions, he lifted it to his mouth with both hands and drained it. The gruel had no taste.

Those being fed with him did not have that hellish odour now, either. Perhaps he had become used to it?

Discarding the empty bowls, they formed a line. The man with the whip pushed Carter into it and someone thrust a hoe at him. He was no longer naked, he realized vaguely. He wore ill-fitting black trousers that seemed strangely funereal on his dead-white body. The whip cracked and the line trudged out of the shelter, along a path to the fields.

As it halted at the work site Carter looked about him, aware that his mind was slowly becoming incapable of thought. He was receiving only impressions, and even those were now fragile and fleeting. In the golden dawn light the mountains all around him were part of a terrifying world in which he was a prisoner or slave. *Deye morne ge morne*. He was uncountable miles away from the home he would never see again.

By tomorrow would he even remember it?

Hugh B. Cave is another of the *Weird Tales* writers that we have attracted to the pages of *Fantasy Tales*. In fact, he sold an estimated and staggering 800 stories to the pulps, including *Strange Tales*, *Oriental Stories*, *Argosy*, *Dime Mystery Magazine*, *Spicy Mystery Stories* and another dozen besides the immortal *Weird Tales* itself! After the Second World War (during which time he had busied himself as a correspondent writing magazine pieces and war books) he moved to Haiti and wrote a book on voodoo, *Haiti: Highway to Adventure*. Later, in Jamaica he bought an old slave plantation in the Blue Mountains and converted it into a coffee plantation. The Caribbean setting has inspired more than twenty books. With the decline of the pulps, Hugh Cave contributed stories to the slick magazines that were published after the war, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Esquire* and others; some further 350 stories in addition to those earlier pulp sales! Carcosa publishers issued a massive collection, *Murgunstrumm & Others* in 1977, which promptly won the Best Collection award at the World Fantasy Convention. The author has also published *Legion of the Dead* (Avon) and *The Nebulon Horror* (Dell), and this November Ace will release *The Evil*. The story you have just read was previously unpublished.



The Elevation of Theosophus Goatgrime

By BRIAN MOONEY

Illustration by JOHN GRANDFIELD

HIS heart in his mouth, Theosophus Goatgrime scurried down the long, dimly-lighted corridor until he reached a certain door which had carved upon it, in relief, the One Thousand Sufferings of the Venerable Messer Brewdroop. Goatgrime winced and averted his eyes hurriedly. A certain strength of character was needed to face the sainted Brewdroop's agonies unflinchingly.

Goatgrime knocked gently on the door, his fist inadvertently striking an intimate portion of the unfortunate Messer's anatomy. That boded ill. He knocked again, even more quietly. He prayed to all the gods that there would be no response from within, but alack, his supplications were to no avail.

"Enter," rasped a voice, a voice which never failed to induce in Goatgrime the feeling that he was something low on the wheel of life, something in the order of, say, a black beetle. At times like this, Goatgrime wished that he had chosen another, more rewarding career, such as that of nightsoil remover.

He crawled through the door as protocol required him to, suitably humble, and knocked his forehead on the ground the approved number of times, exactly forty-three. Small wonder that those in his order, when their apprenticeships were completed, were called by the more ribald of the laity 'pan-heads'.

The Magister Bombous Mothlight sat before his chryselephantine desk, perusing an imposing-looking parchment which seemed more heavily laden with sealing-wax than ink. Behind him lurked his clerk, Sly-

"Goatgrime began to devote his full attention to the idiot's guide."



weed, chewing as usual at the nubs of his fingernails.

"Ah, Neophyte Goatgrime," boomed the Magister, mock jovially. "You wish to see me?"

"To the contrary, Great Magister, you sent for me," replied Goatgrime in a firm voice. Well, not exactly firm. More like a croak. But it was intended to be firm.

"I did?" questioned the Magister, frowning as if his dignity had been called to account. "Ah yes, so I did." The odious Slyweed giggled through a mouthful of fingers.

Bombous Mothlight leaned back in his obsidian throne, whuffled his white beard importantly, and peered sternly at Goatgrime from beneath luxuriant eyebrows. Despite himself, Goatgrime began to squirm. Mothlight's mouth twitched. He knew full well that his gaze invariably had such an effect on the neophytes of his order. Each time Goatgrime had to face the Magister he would admonish himself, no squirming, but he always succumbed. This was a source of enjoyment to Mothlight, whom Goatgrime suspected of having a sadistic streak. Rumour had that when Bombous Mothlight was a small boy, he would shorten the right-side legs of millipedes and similar many-limbed creatures just to see them limp. Had the Magister not become a wizard, Goatgrime reflected, he might well have been attracted to some equally suitable profession, such as state torturer or perhaps schoolmaster.

Abruptly, Mothlight leaned forward, lowering his head and eyebrows and peering upwards even more sharply. Goatgrime's squirming eased into an intricate writhing. He knew what was coming next and tried to steel himself against it; ever since his ninetieth birthday, his nerves had been somewhat less than strong. To be honest, they had never been very good. Mothlight stretched his lanky arms, twined his skeletal fingers together, and crackled his knuckles so loudly that he would have startled the most doughty of warriors. Goatgrime leapt a foot or so into the air, just as the Magister had known he would. Slyweed giggled and gnawed another few inches from his right forefinger.

The Magister Bombous Mothlight smiled gravely. "What *am* I to do with you, Goatgrime?" he asked, his tone made unctuous with spurious sorrow.

"Senile hypocrite!" thought Goatgrime angrily. Aloud he said, "I do not understand, Great Magister."

"How old are you now, Goatgrime?"

"One hundred-and-fourteen circumsolars, lord," Goatgrime confessed, nervously mumbling at his beard, "plus some odd weeks and days."

"Right," affirmed Mothlight fiercely. "One hundred-and-fourteen circumsolars. One hundred-and-fourteen years, two quarters, seven weeks and four days, to be precise."

"But I wear well, lord," Goatgrime hastened to assure him, hoping to allay whatever unpleasantness his master had in mind.

"Oh yes, you wear very well. I'd say you were the most wearing fellow in the whole order, eh Slyweed?"

To demonstrate his appreciation of the jest - and also trying to ingratiate himself - Goatgrime cackled.

"You have little to laugh at, Goatgrime," the Magister warned, "You are one hundred-and-fourteen years old, and you have been apprenticed to this order for one hundred-and-one of those years. By my reckoning, that makes you the oldest neophyte in this college. Why, you were entered into the order but a few weeks after I myself, and I was proclaimed Master Wizard on my thirtieth birthday."

"You were thomewhat advanthed, Mathter, a veritable geniuth," interposed Slyweed, wriggling in a disgusting manner. It was whispered salaciously that the Magister had certain proprietary rights over the clerk's plump person.

"That's true," beamed the Magister, pleased by the compliment from his favourite, "But mark you, Goatgrime, most are admitted to full Wizardship by the time they are thirty-five. But not you. Year after wearisome year you are examined, and yet you are always found to be wanting. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Er...the gods are against me?" hazarded Goatgrime.

"No, you oaf! You're incompetent!"

Bombous Mothlight roared, "You lack concentration, ability and deftness. You do not comprehend the meaning of conscientiousness, application and ambition. You are an idle, inefficient, careless, shiftless dodderer. You should not have been admitted to a conjurers' school, let alone the finest order of thaumaturges in the world. You are -" He was beginning to go purple in the face, and Slyweed, aware that his position depended solely on the Magister's well-being, quickly became alarmed. With soothing murmurs and liberal draughts of wine, he managed to restore the Magister's equilibrium.

"Goatgrime," growled the Magister, when he was once more in control of himself, "you have become a burden on this college. You have survived this long only because of the misplaced benevolence of my predecessor, and my obedience to his final wishes that you should be given another chance. But your constant failure to make anything of yourself is a blot on our good reputation. *Something* will have to be done."

"Yeth," echoed Slyweed, his piggy eyes sparkling. "Thomething will have to be done. And thoon."

"And it shall be done now," proclaimed the Magister. "Neophyte Goatgrime, I am taking the rare - but not unprecedented - step of stripping you of your apprenticeship and moving you to lower grade work more suited to your abilities."

"Is there no alternative?" cried the anguished Goatgrime.

Slyweed leaned forward and whispered briefly into Mothlight's ear. The latter grinned a huge grin. "It seems, good Goatgrime, that I can offer an alternative," he smirked. "You may continue as a trainee wizard until such time as I have sent an adverse report on your progress to the Grand Ipsissimus of our order and he has pronounced judgement."

Goatgrime gulped.

"You recall, perhaps, what happened to the last person concerning whom an adverse report was sent to the Grand Ipsissimus?"

Goatgrime nodded feebly. It had happened at another college of the order, one where the discipline was

said to be really harsh. The Grand Ipsissimus had been so angered by the misdeeds of the erring apprentice that he had cast a spell, an irrevocable spell, upon the hapless fellow. The neophyte still lived at the college, in the garden, where he was kept fit and well on a succulent diet of slugs, worms and other wriggling things. It was claimed by those who had seen him that he was the finest-looking toad in the land.

"I see now the wisdom of your decision, O Great and Magnanimous Magister, and defer to it without further debate," decided Goatgrime, cringing and bowing the while.

"I thought that you might see reason," purred the Magister Bombous Mothlight. "You may now surrender your Neophyte's Hat." He pointed to the unlovely conical ruin which balanced loosely on Goatgrime's head.

"Not my hat," moaned Goatgrime, aghast. He clutched possessively at the headwear. "This hat has kept my head warm for many years now."

Again Slyweed leaned forward to whisper. The Magister scowled and then nodded. "Slyweed has pointed out that as your hat is so battered and time-worn, it would be an insult to offer it to another. Furthermore, its current value is about one copper piece, or in kind, one bowl of inferior oats. As a gesture of goodwill, therefore, I will permit you to retain the foul object."

Once more Goatgrime cringed his thanks, and Mothlight continued: "From tomorrow morning, Goatgrime, you will be working in the library. You will report to Master Librarian Wormwedge at first light. He will allot you your tasks. And think well on this, Goatgrime," here the Magister turned and winked at Slyweed, as if in some private joke, "If you work hard, you may well find that in your new position you will be able to elevate yourself, to rise to a high position, to give a good account of yourself."

Goatgrime had expected some punishment far worse than being sent to work in the library, and was overcome with gratitude. He fell to his knees, crying as he did so: "Thank you, Great Lord. Thank you."

kind Master Slyweed." And having pounded his skull against the floor forty-three times, Goatgrime skipped off, singing. As he went, he puzzled at the sounds of mirth which pursued him down the corridor.

MASTER Librarian Wormwedge was a brittle, dusty man, noted mainly for his great age and greater irascibility. He snapped his turtle-like head up as Goatgrime entered the library, and the ensuing cloud of dust caused the former apprentice to sneeze violently.

"What do you want here, you despicable remnant of a man?" demanded the ancient, shaking a fist and thus smothering Goatgrime with even more dust.

"The Magister ordered that I report to your august presence, good Master Wormwedge," said Goatgrime, wiping the tears from his eyes and his nose with the sleeve of his habit. "I am going to be a librarian."

"You, a librarian?" howled Wormwedge, and he began to make a frightening rasping noise, which quite alarmed Goatgrime until he realised that the other was laughing. At last the librarian recovered his composure by sucking in great, whooping gasps of air. "Why, you're not here to train as a librarian, you buffoon. You have been sent here to be a sweeper, a cleaner, a floor-scrubber, a delver into filthy places, a factotum. I would not permit *you* to work as a keeper of books, even if I were threatened with the Third Abominable Curse of the Itching Impotence. You must start to see yourself as the bearer of my ordure, you wretched fellow."

Affronted, Goatgrime drew in a quivering breath, only to be violently assailed by another outbreak of sneezing and coughing. When his eyes cleared, he saw that Wormwedge was holding two gigantic candlesticks, which were surmounted by only slightly smaller candles.

"Come along, you cretinous boy, I haven't got all day. Take these candles and I'll lead you to your first task. It should be sufficient to keep you out of mischief for ten years or so." He turned away

and led Goatgrime through the innermost recesses of the library, down several flights of chilled, worn steps, through several noise-some cellars, until at last they could go no further. Here the Librarian pointed to a great metal ring set in a flag. "Lift that," he commanded.

Eyes starting from his head, Goatgrime huffed and puffed and heaved and strained until eventually he managed to swing up the huge stone. A gust of musty air rose from the darkened pit below. In the flickering light of the candles Goatgrime could see a flight of wooden stairs disappearing into the gloom.

"Down there," instructed Wormwedge, "you will find the accumulated rubbish of about six or seven centuries, books, papers and so on. I want you to sort it into neat piles: that which is worth keeping, that which might be worth keeping, that which might be worth throwing away, and that which is not worth throwing away at all."

Goatgrime thought this instruction rather tangled, but knowing how the Librarian reacted when questioned, he held his peace. He did say, however: "There will probably be bats and spiders and rats and all manner of unpleasant creatures down there, Master Wormwedge."

"Then you should feel quite at home," was the amiable retort.

Snuffling miserably, Goatgrime fumbled his way down the steps into the dark. When he had descended a few feet, ancient Wormwedge passed him the huge candlesticks.

"You may break your fast at the third work hour," said the Librarian. "You may take your luncheon at the eighth work hour, and you may come up to sup and sleep after sunset. Do you have any stupid questions for me, or are you going to act totally out of character and use your initiative?"

As was his wont, Goatgrime thought of searing repartee some four hours later. By this time he had thoroughly explored his new domain, and he quailed at the magnitude of the task before him. This subterranean level to which he had been brought consisted of some

fifty large rooms or cells, linked together by labyrinthine corridors. Never in his life had Goatgrime seen such an accumulation of paper-work.

There were victualling accounts and examination papers, rolls of honour and scrolls of dishonour, laundry lists and tattered maps, plans and blueprints, prayer wheels and curse wheels, prescriptions and compendiums, encyclopaedias, receipts, discarded theses and dissertations, essays and precis and much, much more. And there were books, books and more books, dealing with every conceivable subject from abacedarianism to zymosis.

Moreover, most of the content of the lower levels had been turned into dens, nests and lairs by a multitude of life-forms, all seemingly having an excessive number of legs, drooling fangs and myriad gleaming eyes. Goatgrime opined that the most efficient way to cleanse the area would be to touch a torch to everything. The problem here would be that the flames would spread so swiftly that whomsoever set the conflagration would have to risk immolating himself too. Goatgrime was not yet prepared to become a martyr to the cause of neatness.

After much cogitation, which took him some several days of idling away from the sight of Master Librarian Wormwedge, Goatgrime decided that the very best place to begin his work would be at the innermost cell of the place. This room was the smallest, filled only with crates of books, and had been occupied by a colony of glow-worms, whose gentle illumination Goatgrime found friendly and cheering.

Goatgrime's system of working was to go to the small cell at the start of his working day, settle down in a corner and browse through books until it was time for him to reappear. Whenever Wormwedge enquired how the work was proceeding, Goatgrime would reply cheerfully that all was well.

One morning Goatgrime chanced upon a book which aroused his interest more than any he had encoun-

tered before. The tome was an old one, a veritable incunabulum, with stiff, creaking covers and crumbling leaves. The faded title on the cover was in Old Thunic, an ancient language but one which Goatgrime had necessarily studied many years previously. He retained enough knowledge of it to pick his way through the title. The book was called *A Layman's Introduction to the Art of Magick: being a Compendium of Simple Spells, Charms and Philtres Recommended for use by the Uninitiate*. Below this title, some wag had scrawled "An idiot's guide!"

At the eighth work hour, Goatgrime ascended to the upper levels to have his bowl filled with his midday ration of frumenty. At the same time he purloined an Old Thunic dictionary while Wormwedge's attention was distracted.

Returning to his hidden chamber, Goatgrime began to devote his full attention to the idiot's guide. Part of Goatgrime's problem as an apprentice wizard had been that many of the spells requisite for progression were long and complicated. He just could not remember more than fragments at a time. If the idiot's guide was written for the layman, its contents were almost certainly simply worded and if Goatgrime could master some of the spells he might well regain his lost apprenticeship.

He was disappointed to find that much of the book's instruction was devoted to such matters as were scorned by the members of his order: love potions, murrains, curses to cause hair and teeth to fall out, cures for barren matrons and impotent grandfathers, ways to inflict or remove pimples, sores and boils, means of banishing vampires, were-creatures, poltergeists, bogles, bugaboos and the like.

Several times Goatgrime wanted to throw the book away, but overcame the urge and continued reading. His tenacity was rewarded suddenly. He turned a page and what was written there startled a cry from his withered lips. It read: "How to summon a Daemon, that Ye may be granted all Desires."

Goatgrime scabbled through the

dictionary quickly to ensure that his translation was an accurate one. It was. He began to read avidly. As he read it became apparent that the neophytes of his order were constantly misled by their mentors, who held that only an admitted wizard could summon a being from the nether world, while no-one below the rank of Master Wizard could understand him and indubitably none less than Magisters or Ipsissimi could control him. According to the idiot's guide, all that was required to control a demon to the extent of being granted wishes was a limited degree of literacy and a certain amount of confidence.

The requirements were simple. The place to be used was to be scrupulously clean, the floor was to be inscribed with a pentacle, and a bowl of fresh blood was to be offered as a gesture of sincerity. After that, the reading of a simple line of prose and the demon would materialise.

For the first time in long, weary years, Theosophus Goatgrime became a man of action. At risk of doing himself a serious mischief, he sprang to his feet and began to drag the heavy crates from the cell. Then he threw out the books by the armful, loped up steps and negotiated rooms and cellars until he was in the main library and flashing past the astonished Wormwedge. Minutes later he reappeared, laden down with buckets of water and various large, businesslike brushes. Concealed beneath his gown were a copper bowl and a sharp knife that he had purloined while requisitioning his cleaning apparatus.

The grime of centuries was not dispelled with ease. Goatgrime scrubbed and burnished that distant cell for many long hours. When he heard the querulous voice of Wormwedge bidding him come sup, he cried out: "Too busy! too busy! and threw himself at his labours with revitalised effort.

When at last the floor and walls were to Goatgrime's satisfaction, he erected a clumsily constructed lectern of books, placing the idiot's guide on the top, open at the page of the demon-calling spell. He plucked a pair of un-

protesting glow-worms from their nest and stood them on the corners of the book to give more illumination. Then producing a large piece of chalk, Goatgrime began to draw the pentacle with all the seriousness of a master architect, measuring lengths and angles and divisions, constantly referring to the book until he was sure that the magic circle was perfect. In the appropriate spaces he wrote the mandatory words and phrases, some of them quite startling: Old Thunic was an earthy tongue.

"And now for the fresh blood," he muttered triumphantly when the pentacle was completed. Taking the copper bowl and knife, he crept out into the passage and began to hunt. Before long, he had snared and slaughtered three young and inexperienced rats, draining their blood into the bowl.

As recommended by the book, he placed the copper bowl exactly in the centre of the pentacle, retreated to a safe distance and spoke the eldritch words demanded by the text. A sudden flash of blue lightning smote at Goatgrime's eyeballs and a disgusting odour assailed his nostrils. And then there was the demon. The hideous creature clutched fervently at the copper bowl, lifted it and drained it at one gulp.

"Ptah!" spat the demon, "Rats' blood! O Great Sathanus, where are the warlocks of yesteryear?" It turned to Goatgrime and continued conversationally: "Now there was a fine bunch of men. Fresh virgin's blood almost every occasion, and failing that, the wine from the veins of a young unicorn or even sometimes the life's liquor of a dragon.

"I am sorry," Goatgrime assured the demon, "but we're a little short of virgins, unicorns and dragons around here."

"Never mind," grumbled the demon, "It's been so long since anyone called me that almost anything's blood is a treat these days." It wiped its mouth with a squamous forearm, then gave Goatgrime an engaging grin, revealing an impressive set of green and yellow tusks. "Well, and what can I do for you,

young sir?"

"Just how much are you permitted to do for me?" enquired Goatgrime.

"The regulations allow me to grant you three wishes," the demon replied.

"With that limitation, I can grant you almost anything you want. I can't make you immortal, and I have to draw the line at such disgusting tasks as building temples or ensuring that the path of true love runs sweet and joyful."

"I see. Allow me to introduce myself, demon. I am Theosophus Goatgrime. May I enquire your name? It would be nice to start out on a friendly basis."

"No man has ever asked me that before," said the demon approvingly, "I like that. You are a courteous man. I fear that my real name would be too difficult for you, containing as it does some four thousand syllables, many of them not designed for the human tongue to pronounce. However, you may call me Mustiphomph, a soubriquet given to me several thousand years ago by a very beautiful and wicked queen. Mustiphomph meant something quite bawdy in her language, and I've always liked it."

"Thank you, Mustiphomph," acknowledged Goatgrime. "Now, what would be your price for these three favours? My soul, perhaps?"

"Your soul?" scoffed Mustiphomph. "What use would that be to me? Can you see a soul? Can you grasp a soul? No."

"What then?"

"We exact the living body incarnate."

There was a certain relish in Mustiphomph's tone which caused Goatgrime to shudder. "And, er, what is it you do with the, er, living body incarnate?"

"Oh, things..." said the demon, waving a paw and shrugging.

"What sort of things? Eat them?"

"Not exactly," was the vague reply. "We sort of...do things..."

"I really think I should know before making a decision," insisted Goatgrime. "After all, I am the one who will be paying the price in the end."

"You really wouldn't like it if I did tell you," warned Mustiphomph. "Look here, Theosophus, supposing

that I just tell you one of the least offensive ways we have our fun, and then you can tell me if you want to hear any more?"

"That's fair," agreed Goatgrime.

Mustiphomph leaned forward as far as the pentacle would allow him and whispered a few words. Theosophus Goatgrime went pale, and for a moment he felt very ill.

"You're right," he choked, "I don't think I'd like to hear any more. And I don't think I'll take you up on the offer of three wishes either."

Mustiphomph picked idly at a huge nostril with a long claw. "Pity in one way," he muttered. "It's been a long time since I've had any real fun, and it gets boring down there you know. On the other hand, you are rather scrawny, and we can have so much more pleasure with someone who's got some real meat on him. I suppose I'd better go then."

"Just a moment," said Goatgrime, raising a hand to halt the demon, "Does it have to be me? I mean, if you grant me three wishes, would any incarnate body do?"

"Why, I do believe it might," nodded Mustiphomph, "The Boss insists on one whole living body in return for three wishes, but I don't think he's ever specified exactly whose body it has to be."

Then I know just the man for you, if you're willing to wait until I can fetch him to you," asserted Goatgrime, "He's nice and plump, and much younger than I am, so he should last you a nice long time. I say, you don't object to bitten fingernails, do you?"

"Bitten fingernails will be just fine," Mustiphomph assured Goatgrime, "In fact, one of my brothers created a most amusing diversion involving bitten fingernails. It would have you in stitches."

"Save it till later," said Goatgrime hastily, "Don't go away. I'll be back just as soon as I can with my fee."

All was quiet when Goatgrime slipped back into the college. He had been at his nefarious work for a great many hours, and it was now well into the night. The college slept. Goatgrime made his way to Slyweed's quarters, hoping that the

Magister Bombous Mothlight would be having a night of abstinence.

He gently lifted the latch of Slyweed's door and peeped in. There was only one figure in the pallet bed, so Goatgrime crept forward and shook its shoulder.

"Hush, Slyweed!" he hissed as the clerk leapt up with a startled cry, "It is I, Goatgrime."

"What do you want, Goatgrime?" snapped Slyweed.

"Well, you've always been so kind to me, Master Slyweed," said Goatgrime mendaciously, "that I thought I'd let you be the one to share my good fortune. Of course, if you're not interested..."

"No, wait, Goatgrime," squeaked Slyweed, catching at Goatgrime's sleeve, "What is that good fortune to which you are alluding?"

"You know those cellars to which I have been relegated?" Slyweed nodded frantically as Goatgrime spoke. "Well," continued Goatgrime, "in the farthest cell I discovered a great treasure buried beneath a heap of books."

"A great treasure," breathed Slyweed, "Would that mean *gold*?"

"You are very perspicacious, Slyweed."

"And thilver and jewelth, mayhap?"

"Your insight staggers me, friend."

"Well, good Goatgrime," purred the clerk, "I will be happy to inthpect thith treathure. If it is worthy of my attention, I may well apportion it with you."

"As always, Master Slyweed, your thoughts are for others before yourself," said Goatgrime, rubbing his hands together in a smarmy manner, "Please to follow me, and behold the wonder of your lifetime."

Goatgrime slipped out of the sleeping chamber and dashed off hurriedly, confident that the avaricious Slyweed would be close behind him. When they eventually reached the innermost cell, Goatgrime stood back and gestured that Slyweed should precede him. "Please go ahead," offered Goatgrime, "It is only right that you should have first choice of the wonders before you."

Slyweed ran ahead, and the next moment there was a hideous shriek.

"Gotcha!" rumbled Mustiphomph,

"My word, but you're a fine specimen."

Goatgrime entered to see Mustiphomph turning the screaming Slyweed over and over, prodding him here and pinching him there. Satisfied with his catch, the demon somehow folded Slyweed into a compact bundle and wedged him firmly under an armpit.

"Theosophus," cried the demon, "this offering is just what I wanted. Name your wishes and they shall be granted."

Goatgrime thought for a moment, and then remembered the caustic words of the Magister Bombous Mothlight. "I would like," he said slowly, "to attain a very high position. And I wish to give a good account of myself."

Mustiphomph considered briefly, and then said, "Those wishes present no difficulty. Consider it done. Now, what about your third wish?"

"My third wish? I don't really know about that. I only wanted the two things out of life."

"Look," sighed Mustiphomph patiently, "the regulations call for three wishes. I have just granted you two, and although we are basically dishonest down below, we do like to keep the books straight."

Goatgrime thought for a moment. "Well, perhaps there is something..." he murmured. He had for some time been feeling the return of certain basic urges. As each neophyte entered the order, his drinking water was impregnated with an inhibiting substance to ensure his celibacy. In the case of Goatgrime the anaphrodisiac had been withdrawn on his one hundred-and-tenth birthday, the carefully considered opinion having been that Goatgrime's body would have forgotten all its urges. Goatgrime's gonads were just beginning to reawaken.

"You know," he whispered confidentially, "I really think that I might enjoy a seraglio. I have been deprived for a long time, a very long time, and I am beginning to feel the need for female companionship...companionship of the most obliging kind, if you understand what I mean."

"Say no more," leered Mustiphomph, "I can provide exactly what you are

craving. Come into the pentacle and take my paw. Don't be afraid. I've got my price and I won't renege on our bargain by taking you below."

Goatgrime hesitated momentarily, then did as Mustiphomph bade him. There was an unpleasant sliminess about the demon's hand which made Goatgrime shiver, but he thought it circumspect to disguise his loathing. While Mustiphomph's manner had been amiable so far, there was no telling what the demon might do if he were offended.

"Right, here we go," sang the demon. He whistled, a peculiar, three-noted whistle which hurt Goatgrime's ears and prickled his skin as if by a thousand needle-points.

There was a moment's blackness, an instant of enervating, bone-numbing cold, and then Mustiphomph announced: "We've arrived."

THEY were standing somewhere in the open, in a purple twilight. The air was gelid, and snowflakes danced an erratic saraband about them. Goatgrime's lungs began to heave in an effort to snatch nourishment from the thin air. His gown was inadequate for the temperature and he clutched it closer to his body as he looked around. To his left was a cliff edge, which fell away into darkness until he could see no further: to his right was an edifice which reached vertiginously into the sky.

"Where on earth are we?" he demanded.

"Nowhere on earth," answered Mustiphomph, "I have brought you to the tower of Tynapa f'Kulda, a sage and philosopher of the great planet R'Doum which is at the edge of the universe. Tynapa is dead, so he won't need it any more."

"What possessed you to bring me here, you great oaf?" screamed Goatgrime.

Mustiphomph looked hurt. "Didn't you tell me that you wanted to attain a very high postition? The tower is three thousand feet from base to apex, and standing as it does on a mountain fifty miles into the air, it must be the very highest position anywhere."

"I didn't mean that literally. Surely when I said that I wanted to give a good account of myself you knew what I meant?"

Mustiphomph brightened. "Ah yes, your second wish. This way." He seized Goatgrime's arm, and they instantly materialised in a book-lined room inside the tower. Here it was much warmer. "Tynapa f'Kulda was something of a writer," the demon explained, indicating the books. "Great numbers of these thick tomes are filled with blank pages. There is an abundance of writing instruments and unlimited ink. You should be able to give a very good account of yourself here."

Goatgrime shook his head wearily. "About the harem..."

"The harem! My dear Theosophus, do forgive me. The harem had almost slipped my mind. Come with me." Again he took hold of Goatgrime and hustled the man along several corridors and through a pair of huge brazen doors.

They were in a vast marble hall, with a sunken bath in the middle and luxurious couches scattered all around. Dozens of nude shapes could be seen in the harem, some bathing, some lounging, some playing games. Goatgrime stared, rubbed his eyes, stared again, then winced.

The concubines of Tynapa f'Kulda were uniformly small, and uniformly hideous. They were squat, multiple-breasted and they had pig-like snouts with tiny red eyes winking in the yellowish folds of their faces.

"Don't tell me," sighed Goatgrime, "let me guess... Tynapa f'Kulda was not quite human in shape..."

"That's right," nodded Mustiphomph.

"Three wishes...three wishes, and you didn't manage to get a single thing right," whined Goatgrime.

"You can hardly blame me for that," snapped Mustiphomph, "You should have explained what you meant more carefully. Anyway, I can't stand here all day gossiping with you. The Boss will be wondering where I am. Thanks very much

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for this fine fellow -" patting the outjutting Slyweedian fundament, "- it's been a real pleasure doing business with you, Theosophus Goatgrime. Farewell."


And with a carefree snap of his claws, Mustiphomph and his prize disappeared.

Long moments later, Goatgrime became aware that two of the porcine females were standing close to him. He looked at them and saw that they were ogling him, lasciviously and shamelessly. Goatgrime realised with horror that while they in no

way appealed to him, he certainly appealed to them. With a cry he fled.

After wandering for some hours through strangely-equipped laboratories, oddly-furnished chambers and echoing corridors, Goatgrime found himself back in the book-lined place. He gazed around him, shrugged, selected a book and took up a pen. He dipped the pen into an inkwell and having sighed a long, long sigh he began to give a good account of himself...

Brian Mooney is a writer who prefers to keep his craft a hobby. He is meticulous when concocting a horror yarn and so we are always happy to welcome him to our pages, of which the fantasy you have just sampled is the third to appear in *Fantasy Tales*. Brian recently bemoaned the ineptitude of an editor who saw fit to publish two stories with a similar denouement together in the same anthology; it possibly affected the strength of his tale, *Baby, Baby* (in *The Pan Book of Horror Stories* 1980).





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"Willie stared in horror, his mind refusing to believe what his eyes saw."

The Legacy

By JAMES GLENN

Illustration by JIM PITTS

STANDING in the centre of the rundown room, Willie Lomax looked very much at home. A beam of moonlight scratched his image against the darkness with sharp, cold lines. He was of average height, spreading around the middle from too much beer, and going bald. His face had once been handsome, but the cheeks had melted into jowls that were covered with stubble. It would not have been an unkind face, except for the eyes: chips of flint that glared at casual observers and forcefully discouraged conversation.

The beam of moonlight also cut another image into the darkness,

a ragdoll-rumpled cloth shape that had once been a man. The figure lay at Lomax's feet in a pool of its own blood.

"Goddamn you, old man," Lomax cursed his silent companion. "What does it mean?" He kicked the body when it failed to answer, stared down at the Holy Book again and began reading aloud.

("When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer give its strength to you: you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.")

And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear!"

"Behold thou hast driven

me this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden and shall I be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me."

So the Lord said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord appointed a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him would slay him.)

Shades of meaning were lost on Willie. He grunted loudly after finishing, slamming the book closed, and set his gutter mind working on the puzzle. What was the clue? What did it mean? He looked down at the corpse of the old man and thought back two weeks to the day he had first seen him, sifting through every scene of the time for an answer.

Lomax had always been a gutter rat. He lived an undistinguished life in the residence hotel on the Lower East Side, content at his level of decay and at home among the psychos and losers. His existence had been entirely without incident of merit until the day he first saw the old man.

Lomax was on his way back from the OTB office when he saw the frail old man trying to move his trunks up the stairs. He wore threadbare clothes of undistinguished material, but his features seemed even more worn.

"Can I help you, friend?" Lomax had asked in an affected, sweet voice. The old man looked up with an unreadable expression and said simply: "God should know what you do and reward you."

Lomax sweated and laboured with the three heavy trunks and placed them in the tiny room as the old man instructed. It was a bleak room, a dismal cube with only a single window that looked out onto an inner courtyard. It received sunlight only a few hours a day, and then it was a filtered shaft, slanting through the clouds of grime which hung suspended over that section of the city.

When he set the last trunk down, Lomax rested against it in burlisqued exhaustion. "What you got

in these things, pops, gold?" He wheezed out a dry laugh and fixed his ferret eyes on the tiny old man.

"Only the life of an old man," he said. Lomax decided not to pursue the matter and made a move to leave. "No, come sit with me a moment, young man," the new resident said. "I've been travelling a long time and it's always good to sit and talk." He made a motion toward the only chair in the room, indicating that Lomax should be seated. His bony hand looked like it was covered in rice paper.

"Where have you been?" Lomax asked to make conversation. "Out of the country?" Lomax really couldn't have cared less; he figured the old man might be good for a touch sometime, so he grimaced and endured.

The old man laughed at Lomax's comment. "I have been out of every country at one time or another, young man," he said. His eyes darkened with a hint of something else to be said, but he looked out the window and when he did speak, Lomax was sure it was not what he'd wanted to say originally. "But I think I will not leave this one again."

"That's nice, travelling." Lomax was beginning to feel very closed-in, trapped in the tiny room. He very much wanted to just race out into the street.

"You mistake my meaning - Willie, wasn't it?" the old man said. "You see, I feel the shadow of death very near - oh, don't be upset, I welcome it. And when I am gone, only my legacy will be left." He turned to stare at Lomax, noting with satisfaction the shocked expression on the younger man's face.

"Legacy?" Lomax tried very hard to sound only mildly interested. It must have failed, for the old man shrank back and his features darkened.

"I grow tired, young man. Perhaps if you would leave me to unpack, we could talk another time." He began to rise and moved to open the door.

"Yeah, sure, anytime," Willie mumbled. "I'm down the hall in number ten," Willie left with only

one word of the whole conversation playing over in his mind - "Legacy, legacy, legacy..."

Lomax saw the old man only occasionally after that, whenever their different loving hours could spare a minute. Lomax was by nature a night creature and seldom rose before noon. The old man would often rise at dawn and spend his mornings in long walks around the city.

Whenever he did see him, the old man would always make reference to the legacy, and always it would be cryptic and dark. Lomax had no opportunity to pursue the matter. The old man also spoke about his own death a lot, as old people often do. Lomax just bided his time and went about his business, which usually involved something illegal, waiting for the opportunity he knew would come.

And it did. Late one night, as he was returning home, he checked the old man's room and found it empty. The old man had evidently risen earlier than usual. Lomax knew it might be the only chance he would ever get.

The lock on the door was no problem and in no time he was inside. The room was black as pitch. Lomax was forced to turn on the naked bulb which was the only source of illumination. In the yellow light the room looked like a dying thing, great sores of plaster and scabs of peeling wall-paper created hollows of darkness all around him.

It would not be an easy search.

The only furniture in the room was a bed, a wooden chair and a bureau near the door. In addition, the old man had improvised a nightstand from one trunk and a sofa from the remaining two. It was to the makeshift sofa that Lomax went first, easily picking the locks and opening them. He sifted the clothing inside carefully so that there would be as little sign of disturbance as possible, but he might as well have saved himself the trouble, for at that moment the door to the room swung open and the old man walked in.

The old man stood outlined with a fluorescent halo of hall light.

He was stunned to find anyone bent over his trunks, but not so stunned that he could not act. He rushed forward shouting, "Get away from there!", trying to protect what little the world had left him, and unmindful of his own safety.

A gutter rat always reacts like a gutter rat. And Lomax acted instinctively. He jumped up holding a heavy leather-bound Bible from one of the trunks. He swung the book and smashed it against the old man's temple, sending the frail figure toppling to the floor. Lomax jumped over the prostrate form and made for the door, closing it before anyone passed by. Then he turned his attention to the fallen man. Lomax searched the old man's pockets, but found only change and some stamps - no identification, no wallet.

Suddenly the old man moaned. "You're a tough old fella," Willie whispered. He reached down and grasped the lapels of the old man's jacket and yanked him into consciousness.

"Where is it?" he demanded. "Where is it, old man?" The old man, his eyes unfocused and his head swimming, had trouble looking at Willie.

"What do you mean?" he mumbled.

"The legacy!" Willie screamed, shaking the old man violently. "Where is your goddam legacy?" Instead of fright at Willie's question the old man burst into laughter. Willie became more infuriated and shook him until he stopped. "Where is it?"

The old man sobered and his eyes, lucid now, burned themselves into Willie's soul. "All you need to know is in Genesis chapter four, verses twelve to fifteen," he said with a smile. "I've learned the book well." He gave a shudder and a dark cough. "It is over at last," he whispered in a failing voice, "and the legacy is yours." His smile froze and he was dead.

Willie picked up the Bible from where it lay next to the body and read the passages the old man had told him to. And then he read them again. Each time he sifted the words carefully, looking for a clue.

Now he had read the passage half-a-dozen times, his gutter mind working feverishly over each syllable. Finally he said aloud: "Mark! That's it. '...and the Lord appointed a mark for Cain.'" He dropped the book on the floor beside the body and started tearing at the buttons of the old man's shirt. When he had it open all the way, only the parchment skin was visible. "Where's the tattoo, old man?" he asked. The sightless eyes stared beyond him without response. "It's got to be on his back," he said aloud again. He turned the old man over, removing the shirt as he did.

And then Willie Lomax screamed.

Willie stared in horror, his mind refusing to believe what his eyes saw. There was a swirling pattern covering the old man's entire back, and yet it was obviously only part of a larger plan.

Willie's mind wanted desperately to reject what his senses told him, but he had seen similar patterns too many times to be mistaken. Clearly outlined in burn scars that formed into whorls and ridges was the imprint of a single giant finger!

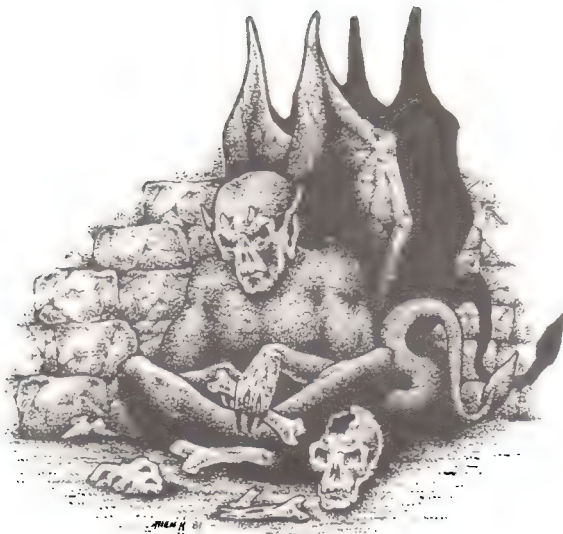
Willie Lomax collapsed. He fell back into the shadows, wedging himself into a corner and began to cry. He knew he couldn't escape, he knew it deep down in his soul. He knew it was the mark of Cain he had seen on that old man's back. There was only one thing he did not know and it was that one thing that terrified him.

"Therefore, whosoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken sevenfold."

What could be seven times worse?

Willie Lomax had won his legacy, and he would have a long time to regret it.

James Glenn is an actor and member of the Professional Stuntman's Federation of America. His collaborative novelization of a horror film, *The Morgue*, is currently being written. The film itself, in which Mr. Glenn stars, will be released in the U.K. in 1982. James Glenn is also an artist, his illustrations appearing in such magazines as *Unearth*, *Galaxy*, *Event Horizon* and others. Short fiction and articles have been published by *Planet of the Apes*, *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*, *Newsworld*, *Black Belt* and other magazines. He has also recently completed a suspense novel, *The Escape Artist*. *The Legacy* is published here for the first time.





"I'm not dead, am I?"

Sic Transit...

By MIKE CHINN

Illustration by RUSSELL NICHOLSON

GEORGE walked into his office on Monday morning, threw his valise onto the scuffed desk-top as he always did, hung his coat on the rack by the window and sat down. Then he saw the Angel.

At least, it *looked* like an angel: the shining robes, white skin and platinum hair, and the harp - a rather gaudy affair, George thought; but the almost sly grin the creature was giving him and the cheeky amusement in the blue eyes did rather cast doubts on the creature's authenticity.

"Ah - you are an angel, I take it?" asked George eventually.

The creature spread its gorgeous, dazzling white wings and glowered at him through the disturbingly perfect eyes.

"What do you think?" it sniffed huffily.

George was taken aback. He sank

against his high leather chair and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe away the beginnings of panicky sweat.

"But...but...?" he gurgled for a full ten seconds before taking himself firmly in hand. "But what are you *doing* here?" His eyes widened with sudden terror.

"I'm not dead, am I?" he breathed.

The angel laughed coarsely. "Of course not!" It handed over a hand-illuminated scroll. "Here - this explains it..."

George scanned the beautiful copperplate lettering, his face growing paler and his eyebrows rising higher with each word. Eventually, his bulging eyes rose to meet the angelic blue ones.

"But I always thought this sort of thing was... *Their* department." His head nodded downwards - and he hoped the angel did not think he

meant "Norhead & Whitby, Insurance Brokers Inc." on the floor below.

"Pure propaganda," replied the angel airily, waving a hand. "Don't have the resources, you see." It moved towards the chair facing George - mumbling in a most un-Heavenly manner when it found it could not arrange its wings properly against the chair's high back.

"The thing is," it continued confidentially, "They get that sort of rumour circulated purely routine. But you'll always get some poor jerk who'll call up Luke, demanding the usual - to which Luke also demands *his* usual. Luckily for all concerned, nothing ever comes of either contract since *They* can't really do a thing - except play cards through all Eternity. Understaffed, you see."

"Understaffed?" echoed George, still unable to believe he was undergoing this scene.

"Sure. Apart from the odd demon and fallen angel, nothing!"

"What? You mean nobody actually goes down there?"

"Well - not often." The angel sniffed, as if remembering some past unpleasantness.

"But surely *everyone* can't be that good!" protested George, who had been brought up Methodist.

"It's not a matter of being *good*!" snorted the angel. "It's *Him*!" It indicated the ceiling with its left pinion. "He's so soft with His creations! He doesn't want anyone to end up down yonder. Even those who do roast for about a million years or so get taken back. Luke is not at all pleased!"

"I'm not surprised..."

"Mind you," the angel began to laugh, "There are *some* who have to go down for a spell. The Marquis de Sade, for example. Now He was dead certain on that score: no Heaven for at least five million years. But Luke didn't want him much either - which is probably why He sent him down in the first place. Caused all sorts of problems, but He was in one of His holier-than-thou moods, and He won in the end. He always wins. Mind you, I heard the Marquis has been given the job of Luke's lieutenant now - leads the

Sunday morning whip-rounds amongst the sinners." At this the angel laughed so violently it fell out of the chair, landing on its wings in a most undignified way.

George began to feel embarrassed. "This is all very well," he said patiently, "but why are you here?"

"I've shown you, haven't I?" grinned the angel, climbing back onto its chair and waving a hand at the scroll in George's hands.

"Eternal Life - near as dammit."

"But why? Why *me*?"

"Feel flattered? Don't be, I've got thirty other customers to see after you, with the same proposition. Anyway, it's not such a service: you live forever, we don't get you up there, and that suits us!"

"Why?" George suddenly became aware he was growing repetitive.

"Use your head, son. If nearly everyone since the Flood is up there, what do you think the housing situation's like? We've got ten thousand billion homeless up there; not to mention the three hundred billion unemployed. And to top that, Marx, Lenin and Trotsky have all got together and formed hundreds of workers' unions."

"No Stalin?" He had meant it as a joke, but the angel shook its head seriously.

"No. Got another two thousand years to do before we see him. Good job, too. All Hell'll break loose when that four meet up again." It laughed at its own joke.

"You said it was *almost* Eternal Life?" prompted George.

"Of course. Gabe's gotta blow the Last Trumpet sometime; it's in his job description. And then *everything* comes to a grinding standstill! Between you and me, if the population goes on increasing up there at the present rate, He'll be forced to end it all before the end of this century. Goodbye twentieth century - hello twenty-first; then bang: goodnight Vienna!"

"Take it from me, son - your best bet is either Life Eternal down here, or growing so evil your eventual fate'll be automatic. Take your choice - but I'd go for the Eternal bit here, myself. If I *had* the choice, that is."

George thought for a moment. "There's no catch?" he asked. The angel shook its golden curls solemnly and tittered.

"Would I lie to you?" it chided.

"Frankly, I don't know. After all, you could be one of *his* -" he indicated downwards - "pretending. You must admit, you haven't spoken or acted much like an angel all the time you've been in this office."

"How d'you know?" shouted the angel.

"What...?" spluttered George, taken aback.

"Have you ever heard or seen an angel before?"

"Of course I haven't..."

"So how do you know what one acts like?" The angel folded its wings in triumph. George sighed heavily, sure he had missed something.

"How do I get this Eternal Life?"

A printed form appeared on George's desk, replacing the scroll - in duplicate. "Simply sign on the dotted line, and we're in business," said the angel.

George read the form carefully. It simply stated that the undersigned (hereafter referred to as the customer) would receive Life Eternal, on Earth. Ten thousand years guaranteed - except for the intervention of the Last Trumpet, or any other Act of God. (For further information, see Celestial Life Assurance pamphlet 23/56a/96).

"No catch?" asked George, as he raised his pen.

"You don't trust me, do you? No catch; straight up, I swear on my mother's grave, cross my heart and hope to live."

George signed.

"Thanks," said the angel. It picked up one of the copies. "You keep the duplicate." It tucked the sheet of paper into one of its sleeves and grinned at George.

"You'll never regret this," it

beamed.

"I hope not," replied George, but the angel had gone.

GOD looked sternly at the angel. "Couldn't resist - just like the rest."

"Good, good," He said. "But one thing: do you have to be quite so insulting? I'm eternally merciful, not deaf."

"Sorry Chief - but it does help. If you act smart they respect you better for it. And remember, ninety percent of them down there aren't Christians or Jews, and even the Moslems are suspicious these days. The good old church is semi-atheist! You've got to appear...undefential."

God pursed His lips. "Hmmm. Sometimes I wonder about you, Raphe. Anyway, how many are there left?"

"I've got to see three million before the Sabbath, and that'll be all."

"And not one is aware of the rest?"

"Not really - though I drop them enough hints while I'm chatting them up. Never occurs to them, for some reason."

"It will do - in about a hundred years."

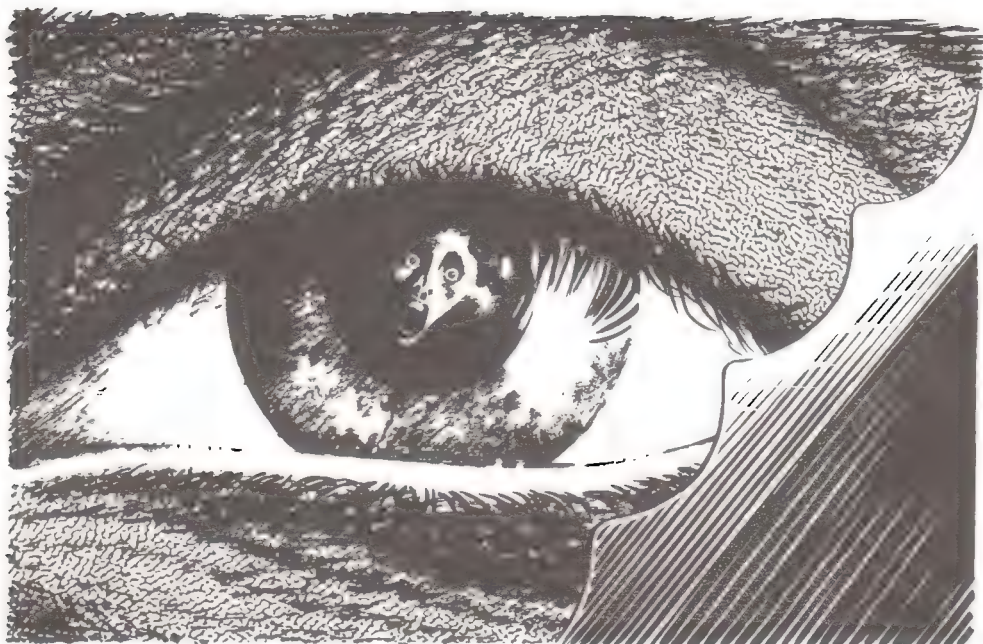
The angel started to laugh uncontrollably. "I can't wait to see their faces when they realise that no one has died, or even got any older..."

God nodded soberly. "They will have to solve the overcrowding, of course; no more children - no sex just in case. Maybe even compulsory sterilization."

"And what will the Pope say to that?" The angel continued to giggle. "You were right, Chief: even if you couldn't bring yourself to send them all to Hell..."

"...Sooner or later, Hell will catch up with them," said God.

Mike Chinn has written two novels, with a third in the finishing stages, but as yet no publisher has been found. A comic strip was accepted by DC Thompson for *Starblazer*, while short stories are due in both *Fantasy Macabre* and *Bizarre Angel*. For the last two years Mike has been co-editor of the journal of The British Fantasy Society, *Dark Horizons*, and is currently developing a series character mixing the occult with Oriental-style pseudo-martial arts. We trust you enjoyed his *Unknown*-type story in this issue.



"In his hand is a knife - a bloody knife."

Shadows from the Past

By MARY CLARKE

Illustration by DAVID LLOYD

OUTSIDE, London was its normal bustling self. Inside, a woman horrified me with a story so gruesome that it was beyond belief.

Indeed, I would have dismissed it as the outpourings of a tortured guilt-ridden mind but for the ghoul-ish outcome and its devastating end in my quiet consulting room.

I am not a doctor in the accepted sense. Some might say I am a charlatan. Be that as it may, stricken people have found peace of mind under my hypnotic influence - a gift given me, I am sure, to be used in the service of troubled mankind.

My name is Charles Williams. By nature I am phlegmatic and matter-

of-fact. It is important that you should know this. I am a bachelor of 35, slim and not unpleasant-looking, or so I think.

The woman who came to me shall be called Bella. You would recognise her real name - if you are conversant with the social scene between the wars. Bella was born in 1910, years before my time but, being a student of the changing nature of our class system, I knew of her and had seen her striking face staring up at me from the yellowing glossy magazines where her likeness had appeared regularly before her inexplicable disappearance from their pages in the 1930s.

Such classic beauty as hers was

is seldom seen these days and, as I looked at those old pictures, I knew that should I ever meet her like I would be sorely tempted to renounce my single state.

On that dismal November day when - out of the blue - she visited me begging for help, there remained about her remnants of her former great beauty. Time could not wither the fine Grecian structure of her face - the firm chin, straight nose, high cheekbones, lofty brow, deep-set eyes. But the skin! How that had changed. In youth it had glowed like alabaster tinted pink. Now it was sallow, dessicated, as if ready to crumble at a touch.

She was of medium height, small of frame but shrunken now as if cringing away from the gaze of other people. Her hair - once a golden halo - was dull lifeless straw.

When she had supplied routine particulars she lay, at my request, upon the couch. Her breath came in gasps and her faded eyes stared wildly around the room.

"Tell me what troubles you, keep nothing back," I spoke soothingly, now stroking her forearm, now her brow, with a rhythmic touch. That was my custom for my power lay in my fingertips, and before long a dream-like state would be induced in the subject under treatment.

"It's too horrible," she moaned. Her head rolled from side to side.

I clasped her hand firmly in mine and, concentrating all my hypnotic power upon her, willed her to relax, to undam the evil stream which clogged her mind.

At last she said drowsily: "He haunts me still."

"Who?" I asked persuasively.

"Jack..."

"Jack who?"

I thought she would name the fiance she had once had - the younger son of one of the noblest families in the land. His name was John and, after Bella had faded from the social scene, he had lost his life in some wild escapade.

"Jack...Jack..," she faltered as though she could not bring herself to name the name.

I tightened my grip on her hand.

"Jack..."

Her body contorted. I knelt beside her, sweating with the effort of having her under my control. I coaxed her to say that name as a midwife might coax a mother reluctant to give birth to her child. Suddenly, with piercing clarity the name exploded from her, shattering the stillness of the room.

"The Ripper!" Breath hissed from her like air from a collapsing balloon.

So taken aback was I by the revelation that she was troubled by a murderer dead, no doubt, before she was ever born that my control of her slackened. She reared upwards, a puppet activated by her fear. I pressed her back and, still kneeling beside her, put my hands on her temples with my fingers stretching upwards into the dry hair and manipulated the tension out of her mind. Slowly, fragment by fragment, her story unfolded.

I can only give you a resume. Her engagement to John had not been happy but it had been sufficient to arouse passions previously unknown. And, because John would not or could not satisfy her demands, she sought lovers - but not men of her own class. She craved for young lusty men, crude in their ways, unrestrained by any inhibitions. Her lovers were coal-heavers, bargees, foreign seamen and the like.

Her last assignation, with a giant of a handsome docker, was in a shabby lodging house in Miller's Court. The very name of the place made her body arch in terror and she screamed as one insane.

I reached to the trolley by my side, took up a hypodermic syringe, plunged the needle into her arm, and pumped in a hypnotic drug.

"Tell me what happened in that room?" I murmured.

Relaxed under the influence of the drug, a small smile crossed her face. "He was wonderful," she said simply, living again that moment of joy. Then her face changed and the fleeting look of pleasure gave way to utter terror. "After he had gone," she said in strangled tones, "the room and everything in it was scarlet."

Her eyes shut and she spoke like

an automaton, demonstrating with her hands, as though what had happened then was happening all over again in my room.

"A man is standing at the foot of the bed where I am lying. In his hand is a knife - a bloody knife. There's a dripping sound like a cistern overflowing. The man is very tall and so thin a puff of wind could blow him away. His face is cruel. His eyes are hollow. He is wearing tight black pants, but his chest is bare - except...except..."

Her teeth chattered. I did not hurry her but sat back on my chair, waiting.

"Except for a necklace. It's horrible. Horrible," she shuddered. "Six hearts hang round his neck, six beating heart. Blood is pumping from them - plop, plop, plop. He is speaking to me. 'My work is to cleanse the streets from such as you. I'll add your heart to my necklace. And that will be another triumph for me in Miller's Court.'" Miller's Court! Of course! It came back to me then. Miller's Court was the scene of the Ripper's last known murder.

Bella opened her eyes and looked at me.

"He took my heart, you know." She spoke calmly as though her capacity for terror was exhausted. Sitting there, I explained to her in simple language about guilt complexes and the strange things they can do to the mind.

She smiled wanly and shook her head. "There is more to it than that," she said. "What about the scar?"

"The scar?"

With trembling fingers she undid the buttons at the top of her dress and pulled the left-hand part aside. There I saw the scar of a deep gash in the flesh covering her heart!

"You must have had an operation years ago and it's been blotted from your mind," I said, stupefied, knowing full well that the incision had not the neatness of one carried out on an operating table.

"I have never had an operation," she said firmly.

Then, I rationalised to myself, her desperate sense of guilt had branded her with its own peculiar

form of stigmata.

Gently I told her so and said: "I can treat you; in time your mind will heal and you will have the strength to let what is past stay in the past."

"But the scar...?"

"That too will fade." Almost absent-mindedly my fingers explored its rough edges, lingering where many hands must have lingered before, fascinated that I was actually touching the beautiful creature of the past; the woman I had in the secret places of my mind embraced and loved.

Why did I, normally so fastidious in my professional conduct, put my hand upon that bared breast? But, carried away by emotion, touch her I did and with carnal thoughts springing in my mind.

In telling what I have to tell, you must remember that my fingertips exert what is almost miraculous power.

Beneath my hand the sagging flesh tightened; the sallow colour brightened; the hair took on a golden hue; the eyes glowed with life; the lips were softly moulded.

There, lying before me, was the girl I had loved as she looked up at me from the yellowing pages of those old society magazines.

In a fit of utter abandonment I caught her in my arms and rained kisses on her hair, her eyes, her lips. For one ecstatic moment she responded. Then, fine-tuned as I am to atmosphere, I sensed the current of fear which went through her even before her body stiffened in my embrace. A scarlet haze filled the room. Gently I released Bella and slowly turned.

There he stood, just as she had described him, the gruesome necklace round his neck. But there were seven hearts, not six! Terror-stricken though I was, of that I was certain. There were three beating hearts on each side. One other hung in the centre half-way down his chest.

"You took her heart," I cried.

He leered at me and nodded his spectral head mockingly towards the couch. I turned. Bella lay there, eyes closed, her dress gaping wide. The stigmata on her breast oozed

red. She was old again, so very, very old.

"Look what you have done," I screamed, my fear decimated by my frantic anger. I lunged forward ready to attack the ghastly creature. But there was nothing there and I sprawled against the mantel-

piece. My consulting room was just as it ever was - cool and scrupulously tidy - except for the rag-doll of a woman stretched upon the couch.

There was no scar to further mar the withered breast. She was no longer afraid. Bella was dead.

Mary Clarke is the pseudonym of a writer of short stories whose work has appeared in such magazines as *London Mystery Magazine* and various popular dailies and weeklies. Ghost stories, in particular, have been published in *The Armada Ghost Book* volumes 6 and 7. Radio's Bristol and Medway have aired eight of her short stories, all of them of the 'twist in the tail' variety, a form she has been most prolific in. 1980 was taken up with writing a novel, a light historical romance entitled *With Wings Spread Wide*. Others of her novels in the crime and romance fields also await publication. The story included here is the first the authoress has published in a fantasy magazine.

Swamp Call

By BRIAN LUMLEY

THERE was blood on the moon last evening,
And a mist that hung low on the moor,
And the sea-fret appeared to be weaving
A dance that was dismal and dour.

I could tell by such signs what was coming:
Strange times when I'd feel the swamp's lure,
When the wind in the reeds would be humming
A song that was dank and impure.

For my love lies in rushes and mire,
Where I laid her the night that she died,
The same night that my brain burst with fire
And red rage when I found how she'd lied!

There was blood on the moon last evening,
And a sad voice that called through the mist,
To tell me my lost love was grieving,
That her lips fondly longed to be kissed.

So I'll leave my drear cot when the owl calls,
And I'll cleave for the swamp in the night,
And you'll hear a small splash as the mist falls,
And her arms close about me so tight...



"It was then that he saw the house."

Weirwood

By MICHAEL D. TOMAN

Illustration by ALAN HUNTER

THE trees around him were sere under the cold breath of late autumn.

Orange, gold, sun-red colours crunched softly beneath his feet, trampled into the barren, greedily receiving earth. A sudden breeze slashed harshly against his thin, withered frame. He was an old man and a chill, as sudden as the breeze, reminded him of the fact, causing a palsied movement beginning at the back of his neck and flowing like an icy tide through his body.

"*This weather augurs a hard winter, I guess,*" he thought, the hand holding his gnarled, pitted pipe betraying his weakness by

shaking. "Reckon I'll have to be haulin' the weir in soon, 'fore the stream freezes over," he said to no one and the forest, knowing that he would have to ask the Gehm boys over to help him, hating the knowledge of his weakness, thinking: "*Christ Jesus, I'm old, old; without strength, without wisdom, without acceptance.*"

He called for his hound, Bess, a five-year-old bitch of indeterminate parentage. She had been chasing through the patchwork maze which was the forest, sparked by some fire that defied the mood of the old man, disdainfully leaving him behind in her quest for a fleeing rabbit. But she was a good dog,

was Bess, and he was nothing but a moody, frightened old man, corruptible flesh afraid to assume the mantle of death which was the legacy given to every creature at birth.

He called again.

Had she vanished into that patch over there? He walked slowly over to the tangled mass of branched wood from a neighbouring tree and pushed aside a couple of scrubby, hardy bushes, poking into the interior with his walking stick. Where was she?

It was part of the character that he affected to others, and which he had adopted to some degree for himself, that he did not let himself become involved with anything he loved. No one, not even his wife before she had died, had ever known the true depth of his love, or so he repeatedly and accusingly told himself more and more as the years passed. Inwardly he knew the guilt to be as exaggerated as the unprofessed love.

But the dog meant a great deal to him.

He tapped his walking stick, a sturdy instrument he had carved himself from ironwood, against a rotting log probably felled by a lightning bolt striking inexplicably from that hot summer's sky.

Then he heard it, sounding upon his ears with the unexpectedness of that sudden flash of light and destruction: a high pale desperate sound, echoing and re-echoing through the suddenly hostile wood. It was a cry of supplication; of pain.

It was the sound of fear.

Heart racing, his breath coming in unevenly measured spasms, the old man jogged raggedly through the black and white forest. His cane whipped at the air and earth before him, turning up small clods of dirt, while cold light filtered through the stark spires of the trees. His pipe and the thought of it lay blasted with the stump.

Winded, his heart protesting at the unseemly exertion placed upon it, he stopped before the dense cluster of trees. It was then that he saw the house.

The lintel across the door was

a deep, rich (*maroon?*) colour. He saw an oak door with what looked like two inset glass plates near its top and a brass knocker at its exact centre. Upon closer inspection, he discovered two windows set at what looked like exactly the same distance from the centre of the house. These windows had been almost hidden by red casements which blended in with the colour of the house.

Leaning on his stick, the air before his eyes gradually losing some of its dizzying quality, he noticed a soft golden light streaming from one of the windows, as if in defiance of the sashes. It was a warm, friendly light that accentuated the darkness cast by the trees which rose up on all sides of the house. It reminded him somehow of his old home, of his chair before the fireplace, of the smell of hot food cooking after a day's tramp through the woods. The light and the house seemed to beckon him forward, toward home, toward rest, toward her...

He started violently, and found that he was on the doorstep. The door, with its brass knocker shaped curiously like a smiling face, was before him. By an unconscious gesture which he had acquired over the years, his walking stick was always before him to guide and help his steps, and he had struck something with it on the doorstep just in front of his feet, something hidden within the lee of the door, something which still quivered slightly with life.

The trees loomed close, as if to see.

His stick came down upon the dog with a single convulsive movement. He crumpled soundlessly to his knees beside her; then raised his head and faced the house before him. "*A hard winter...haulin' the weir in...*"

Even as he watched, its facade shifted subtly as it changed.

He stood up, suddenly conscious of the weight of the walking stick in his hands as he shifted his grip upon it. "*Come on, you bastard. Come and get it.*"

A flock of brightly-coloured birds split the sky with their

strident cries, beginning a late passage to a destination elsewhere,

and then the forest was silent once more.

Michael D. Toman is a writer of both fiction and verse in the fantasy vein. The short story published in this issue marks the author's first appearance in a weird fiction magazine in this country, a strange and poetic vignette that perfectly suits its brevity.



FANTASY TALES is now in its fifth year of publication and with your help it has attained a consistent level of success rarely seen in Britain in the small press. It may be easy for us to sing our own praises, but in terms of what we envisaged for the magazine - entertaining stories, well-illustrated, in an attractive format that pays homage to the pulps - *Fantasy Tales* has hopefully lived up to everyone's expectations.

Two things the magazine has done that have given us a great deal of pleasure are to attract professional writers to what is a small press magazine, and that some of those professionals were *Weird Tales* contributors in its heyday. But we are also pleased to continue providing a market (albeit small) for new fantasy fiction and artwork.

Making mention of FT's history, it might be useful for our more recent readers to know that we still hold back numbers for sale at the original cover price of 60p per copy plus 18p postage (U.S.: \$3.00 including postage). Issues for sale are numbers 4, 5, 6 and 7 (the latter is 93p/\$3.50 including postage). All are in fairly short supply and are expected to soon become as collectable as the first three issues. Orders are now being taken for issue number 9, which will be published later this year. The price will be 75p plus 18p postage (U.S.: \$2.50 plus \$1.00 postage) and please don't forget to

include the postage with your order! Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to *Fantasy Tales* and sent to the new Wembley address on page 2. Although the point has been laboured before, we would encourage you to order FT direct as this helps with the precarious cash-flow.

Before we get into our letters this issue, a brief mention of *Airgedlamh*, the Irish Fantasy one-shot we prepared under the posthumous editorship of Dave McFerran. It is in fact a tribute to Dave, one of fandom's tireless and friendly individuals, who died last year at the age of twenty-six. All profits from *Airgedlamh* go to Cancer Research. A professionally produced, A4, fully typeset magazine, it contains work by Karl Edward Wagner, Peter Tremayne, Adrian Cole (a new 'Voidal' tale), Gordon Larkin, and art by Jim FitzPatrick, Stephen E. Fabian, Jim Pitts, John Stewart, plus an interview with FitzPatrick conducted by Dave McFerran. The price is £1.50 plus 25p postage and packing (U.S.: \$6.00 includes p&p). The magazine is limited to 500 numbered copies and is selling well, so please order soon.

Finally, we would like to thank you for buying this issue of FT. If your support continues, the magazine will be around for many more issues yet!

BEST ISSUE FOR ARTWORK

From, Brian Lumley, Bedhampton, Hants: "This time, if I may, I'd

like to look at the artwork. Nothing against the prose but the art deserves something special. I count ten pieces excluding fillers/ads/others. Page 24 and the back cover are Fabian, and while his artwork is always good it seems somehow that he no longer relates. I think maybe I'm used to the idea that a Fabian is used *because* it's a Fabian. There are no less than three macabre masterpieces in this issue, and I don't think I'm stressing the point too strongly in saying so. They are, in order of merit, Dave Carson's incredible art on page 36, Alan Hunter's utterly *weird* picture on page 18, and Randy Broecker's thing on page 25 (which I shall remember as "The Treader of the Dust"), that somehow reminds me of a cover I once saw on a Warren magazine but can't remember which one. Carson I like for his sheer horrible brilliance, Hunter for a visual nightmare, and Broecker for out-ECing EC! These are *splendid*. Jim Pitts has a marvellous cover and interior, but he's restricted here by lack of colour and by the S&S concept. His execution, however, is...well it's Pitts, and that says it all. The two Lloyd drawings didn't do a lot for me this time, but they do have the benefit of losing nothing in distraction. That is to say, there's nothing in the way of the eye, the surrounding text being mercifully blank. Page 16 is, in addition, quite *Psycho*-ish, for which reason I like it. In Russell Nicholson's piece on page 30 (which is splendidly done), Gretch is *not* staring pensively at all! He is agast! But the art, as I've said, is quite lovely. I wasn't at all taken by the Carson fillers: too comic bookish (but his Chapman ad on page 19 is superb!). Likewise, the Pitts and Hunter pieces on Pages 8 and 44 respectively were not particularly remarkable. OK, so what do we have? Put it all together and I think it would be safe to say that this is the best issue for artwork so far. If old *Weird Tales* was around today, these guys would (or should) be doing the illustrations. The only thing I would add is this: I've recently seen a lot of original artwork by these artists and others

in London, and I personally reckon that we have the finest limners in the world right here in dear old Blighty. *Fantasy Tales* is fortunate to have their support."

CONTINUED EXCELLENCE

Francis M. Kazakwic, New York, N.Y., writes: "I've been reading FT since issue 4 and I applaud your continued excellence. You're publishing a very worthwhile magazine, the like of which *nothing* put out over here in the U.S. comes close to. The artwork is continually stunning, and the stories always run the fantasy gamut, from swords to horror, making each one's difference enjoyable and adding to the overall appeal of FT. Don't even consider ever devoting an issue to any particular vein or sub-genre. My favourite three stories in FT7 were *The Last Horror Out of Arkham* (that because of my Cthulhu bias), *The Woodcarver's Son* and *Reflections on a Dark Eye*, although the ending of the latter I thought could have been improved upon. My favourite illustration was *The Moon Bog*. Maybe a few more full-page illustrations are in order."

TREMAYNE FIRST

From regular FT illustrator, Alan Hunter, Bournemouth: "It becomes increasingly difficult to say anything original or constructive about *Fantasy Tales*. It has now reached such a consistent level of excellence, that one hopes for something outstanding or abysmal with almost equal intensity. Then there would be something definite to comment upon. This issue has neither. Indeed, each story is of such equal merit that it is unfair to even try to rate them. What does score this time is the cover. Recent covers seem to have raised a fair bit of criticism, but this time surely nobody can dislike this great piece of Jim Pitts art. It looks good and is not overbalanced by the coloured logo. In my estimation, your most successful cover since you gave up full colour. If you really twist my arm for the first three places in the story rating, then I would place Peter Tremayne's *Reflections on a Dark Eye* first. A super-

natural mystery story with a great atmosphere of suspense - and an English setting, which makes a change. In second place the well-crafted story of *The Other One*, and *The Last Horror out of Arkham* in third place; a Lovecraft pastiche carried out with flair and gusto. But this is a rather arbitrary selection because the stories were all good. And the artwork was also good, with Jim Pitts producing an excellent full-pager and some interesting contributions from Dave Carson. Certainly, one of your best issues."

THE BEST YET?

Dave Morris, Woking, Surrey, comments: "It's always a delight to find a new issue of *Fantasy Tales* on sale - and particularly the latest, which I think must be the best yet. I expect the black and white covers will continue to be a subject of controversy in *The Cauldron*. This one looked too muddy and grey to me. Fabian's design on the back is more the sort of thing you need for the front cover - but then it would have been marred by the captions... Most of all, I liked *The Woodcarver's Son* and I look forward to seeing more stuff by this fellow Cook. After that, I have to swallow my pride and admit I was just too hasty in condemning the Kane story in *The Cauldron* last time. I read *The Other One* and I thought it was pretty good - well, masterful, if you want the truth! I'll put *Payment in Kind* equal second with that because, although not as well executed as Mr. Wagner's story, it has a damned good plot. (I remember a dinner from my college days where each guest had to devise a new kind of curse. Not at all easy, as you say). *Wrapped Up* was next. Not much to say about it except that it was true to Ramsey Campbell's aim of doing a horror story along EC Comic lines. And it was very enjoyable. (Unlike the occasional piece you run that seems like an unintentional resume of a bad EC story. Mentioning no names...) Not so long ago there would've been quite a fuss over a spoof (not a pastiche as you claimed in the footnotes) HPL story. I seem to re-

member something of the sort from the days of *The Magazine of Horror*. I'd be the last to complain; I thought Mr. Schweitzer's story was great fun. More so than many a serious Lovecraftian piece. And lastly to *Reflections on a Dark Eye*. The one bad apple in this bunch. Peter Tremayne must have written this years ago and been looking for a place to off-load it. Maybe I was missing the point or something, but I found it merely leaden. This is surely an illustration of Peter Bayliss' fear, that you might run stories by well-known authors without regard to their actual merit. After that sour note, let me say that I did like the poetry this issue. *Bleak December* was like some really crazy dream - marvellous. *Limbo* was sad and beautiful, and it's a great shame that the genre has lost another Master in H. Warner Munn."

PITTS COVER SUPERB!

From this issue's contributor, Brian Mooney, Dover: "I struggled to find superlatives to describe the Pitts cover for FT7, and failed miserably. In general, I have always liked Jim's work: some pieces I have thought excellent, some I have considered commonplace, but this Kane illustration has a strength and depth hitherto rare in his work. If asked, I would say that it is with this illustration that he has matured as an artist. Superb!"

MOST POPULAR STORY

Last issue's most popular stories were: *The Other One* by Karl Edward Wagner, *The Woodcarver's Son* by Robert A. Cook, and *The Last Horror Out of Arkham* by Darrell Schweitzer. Send your three favourite stories from this issue to: The Cauldron, FANTASY TALES, 73 Danes Court, North End Road, Wembley, Middx. HA9 OAE, England.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

The artwork on page 14 is by Andrew Smith and the illustration on page 37 is by Allen Koszowski. Jim Pitts produced the heading for *The Contents* page and the heading for *The Cauldron* is the work of John Grandfield.



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